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STARBURST

MANDO 101

YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO THE RETURN OF THE MANDALORIAN

SOUL

DRACULA

SIMON PEGG

WANDAVISION

DAWN OF THE DEAD

I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE

GERRY ANDERSON'S UFO

STAR WARS HOLIDAY SPECIAL

+ MUCH MORE...

ISSUE 475

STARBURST magazine

9 770955 114176 75

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7TH NOVEMBER

THE EXORCIST III
14TH NOVEMBER

THE HERETICS
21ST NOVEMBER

DELIVER US FROM EVIL
28TH NOVEMBER

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Starburst is printed in the UK by BUXTON PRESS LIMITED
Palace Road, Buxton, Derbyshire, SK17 6AE

Distributed by Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 2nd Floor, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU.
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EDITORIAL

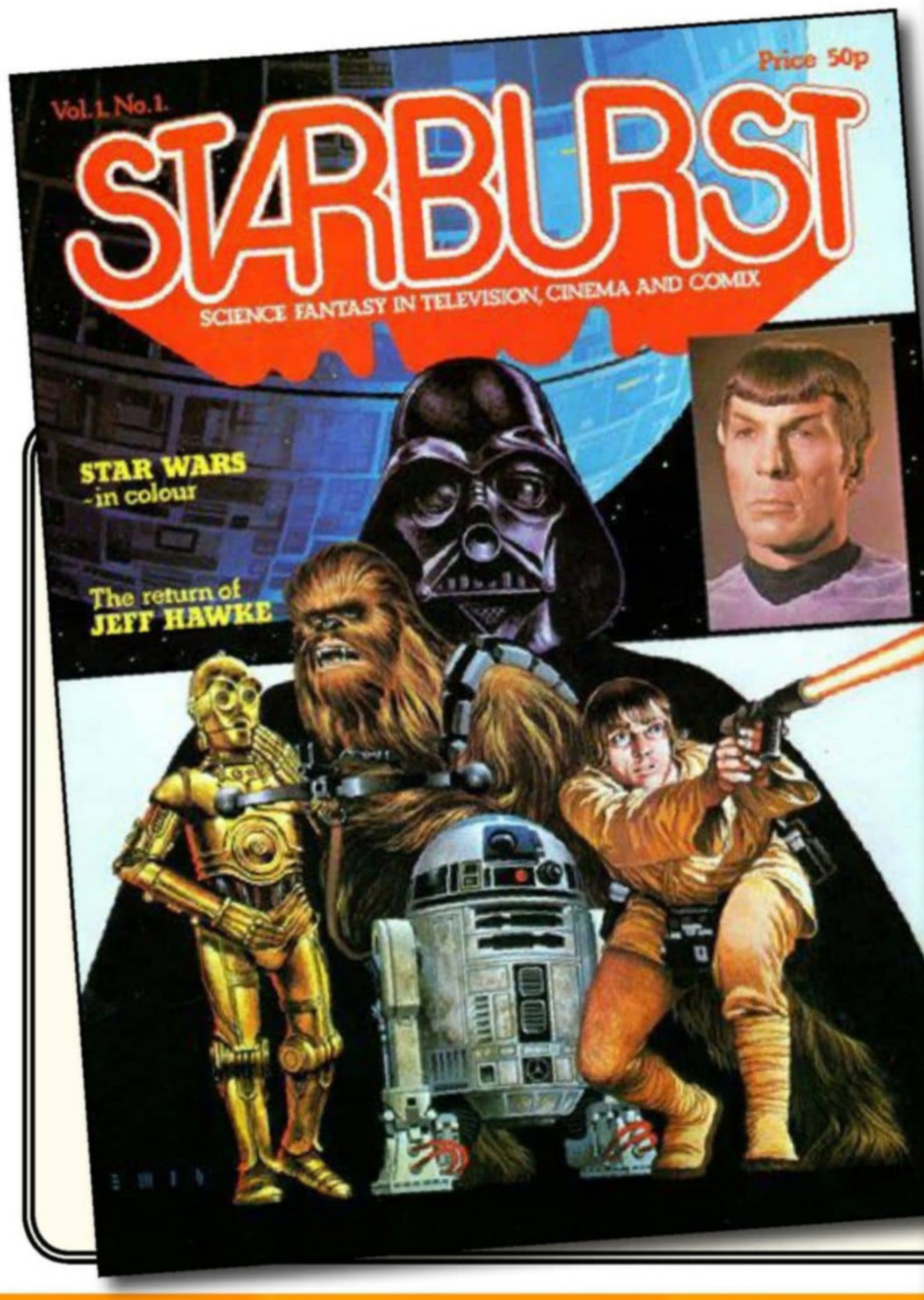


Welcome to **STARBURST** Issue 475.

This magazine has always had a special relationship with **Star Wars**. Back in 1977, the editor at launch, Dez Skinn, procured the first images of this legendary flick and was the reason why we sold out all across the UK.

Since then, the fans' relationship with the franchise has been fraught. Especially with bellends such as Grace Randolph continually leaking shit about the franchise that can only serve to dampen any pleasure derived from it.

The Mandalorian arrived on **Disney+** as a breath of fresh air. This was the **Star Wars** that we were looking for. It nailed the zeitgeist of what **Star Wars** is. It gave us the real deal. I was on holiday in the States and managed to partake of an ice hockey game. A fantastic experience to be fair. The **Vegas Golden Knights** allowed me to have a jolt of the sports experience that had only previously been afforded to me by **Rollerball**. Every break was *exactly* what you would have expected. Cheerleaders, expensive video



ads, and then Baby Yoda turned up on the screen, as an animation wishing the Knights a swift victory. "Baby… Yoda… Baby Yoda", chanted the entire stadium. That was the moment when I knew these guys nailed it.

The Mandalorian is old-school television, delivered with a touch of class. Before **Breaking Bad**, we used to devour episodic television. Back then, we didn't know any better. Mando, whilst having many ongoing plot threads, gave you a mini-movie every week and we lapped it up. Suddenly, **Star Wars** was no longer something to be argued over, it was something to enjoy. As a child that watched the original movie with my grandparents at the Odeon cinema, back in the summer of 1978, this show reminded me of the spark that lit the fire of my childhood.

The child that I was would have loved this show, and the meagre streaming fee was an absolute bargain. This was the **Star Wars** we needed. The **Star Wars** that we knew would arrive someday. What an absolute joy this show was. So… yeah, we have decided to exploit it in order to sell loads of copies of this issue of the magazine.

It's not only Baby Yoda getting the ear finger massage, though, we have tons of other stuff for you to devour. We speak to Simon Pegg and Nick Frost about the TV show **Truth Seekers**, and we journey back to the **Star Wars Holiday Special**. This issue is literally jam-packed with content, while also bringing you all of your monthly favourites.

Whenever you see **Star Wars** on the cover, you can be guaranteed that we have gone that extra mile. It is a franchise that we don't just cover. **Star Wars** is a part of our soul. If you download the free copy of our first issue, then you will get just how important these movies have been to this mag.

Until next issue, keep watching the weird and wonderful,

Jordan Royce

STARBURST GIVEAWAY!

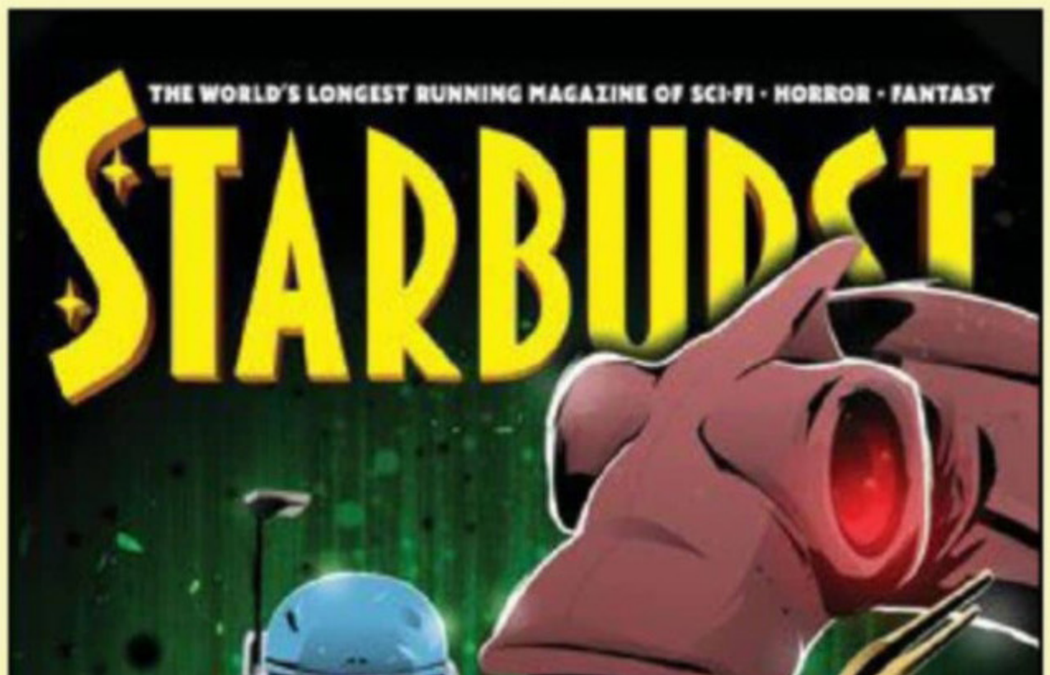
Grab yourself a FREE digital copy of the highly collectible FIRST ISSUE of STARBURST from 1977!

The first ever issue of STARBURST was published in December 1977 and featured the first coverage of **Star Wars** in a UK magazine. Edited by the legendary Dez Skinn - the British Stan Lee - as well as containing a feature on the making of the greatest cinema saga of all time, there are comic strips from Dave Gibbons (**Watchmen**), Sydney Jordan (**Jeff Hawke**) and Brian Lewis (**Eagle**), as well as a feature on the writers of **Star Trek** written by Tise Vahimagi and screenwriter Christopher Wicking (**Scream and Scream Again**).

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THINGS TO COME

THE ESSENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN GENRE ENTERTAINMENT...



DOCTOR WHO

New images and plot details have been released for this year's festive special, *Revolution of the Daleks*. Written by Chris Chibnall, the episode will see the Doctor locked up in a high-security prison, while back on Earth, her companions Yaz, Ryan and Graham must investigate a disturbing plot involving a Dalek.

But after Christmas, when will we next see the Doctor? Though filming has been delayed due to the pandemic, reports indicate that cameras will finally roll on Series 13 towards the end of this year. It's possible, then, we'll get more episodes in late 2021 as originally planned, though there is, of course, potential for further delays. Speaking of Series 13, actor Mandip Gill has told fans that it will go further into Yaz's backstory, in particular her mental health issues that were introduced in Series 12's *Can You Hear Me?*.

In the meantime, there are plenty of **Who** spin-offs, not least **Daleks!**, a new animated series. Part of the **Time Lord Victorious** multimedia project, **Daleks!** will follow the Doctor's oldest enemies as they invade the fabled Archive of Isos and encounter an ancient and deadly force, which soon poses a threat to their home planet of Skaro. Starring Nicholas Briggs, Joe Sugg, Anjli Mohindra, and Ayesha Antoine, **Daleks!** will consist of five ten-minute episodes and premiere on the **Doctor Who** YouTube channel on November 12th. It also features the Mechonoids!

Also newly announced are two new **Doctor Who** video games to be released in spring 2021. **The Edge of Reality** is a first-person puzzle game in which players will join the Thirteenth and Tenth Doctors – voiced by Jodie Whittaker and David Tennant – on a mission to save the universe. With gameplay similar to the recent VR adventure **The Edge of Time**, it will be available on consoles and PC.

The other new game, this one a mobile game for iOS, Android, and Nintendo Switch, is **The Lonely Assassins**. This will see players work with Osgood to investigate a 'found phone'. which reveals a sinister series of events connected to the haunted house from 2007 episode *Blink* and the origins of the Weeping Angels. | KM



STAR TREK

We may still not have a UK broadcaster for **Lower Decks**, but there's still exciting animation news, with the announcement that Kate Mulgrew is reprising her role as Captain Janeway in the upcoming **Star Trek: Prodigy.** The surprise news was made at the (virtual) New York Comic Con by Alex Kurtzman and **Prodigy** showrunners Kevin and Dan Hageman. "*I have invested every scintilla of my being in Captain Janeway, and I can't wait to endow her with nuance that I never did before in **Star Trek: Prodigy**. How thrilling to be able to introduce to these young minds an idea that has elevated the world for decades. To be at the helm again is going to be deeply gratifying in a new way for me,*" Mulgrew said at the event. Kurtzman announced Mulgrew as 'the star' of the show, indicating that Janeway will be the central character in the show. **Prodigy**'s official synopsis says it's about "*a group of lawless teens who discover a derelict Starfleet ship and use it to search for adventure, meaning, and salvation.*" How this fits in with Janeway remains to be seen, but it looks like the teens may well have guidance from one of Starfleet's finest. Unlike the widely expected **Picard** announcement a couple of years ago, this had been successfully kept secret for over a year. Mulgrew – whose last **Trek** appearance was a cameo in 2002's **Star Trek: Nemesis** – has already started recording dialogue for the show, which is due in 2021. Now we've had the return of Janeway and Picard, how about completing the trilogy of '90s **Trek** captains and giving us a new Ben Sisko show? Pretty please? We'll even stop dissing **Discovery** if you do!

On the subject of **Discovery**, Kurtzman has been talking about future plans for the show (currently airing its third season on Netflix) along with the rest of the **Trek** franchise: "*I'm going to say in all honesty there are years and years left on **Discovery**. I think that because, first of all, **Star Trek** in general has a long history of going seven seasons minimum* [we're assuming he meant maximum here]*, and we just jumped into the future - it's a whole new set of variables with a whole new set of ideas and stories. I don't think we limit ourselves to thinking, 'Oh we're capped at this place'.*" Besides **Discovery** potentially running for many more years (Season 4 was confirmed just as we went to print), Kurtzman revealed that they've been mapping out **Trek**'s future on television up to 2027, with a variety of new shows planned.

Elsewhere, both November's **Destination Star Trek** and December's **Star Trek Las Vegas** events have been hit by COVID. Vegas has been cancelled entirely, with a new, 55th anniversary event announced for next

WATTO'S EMPORIUM

Hey everyone, time for merch talk! And while DC's **Wonder Woman 1984** may keep on ruddy moving, it's now currently set to be a lovely Christmas gift for fans this year, finally landing on Boxing day here in the UK (emphasis on the word 'currently'). So, with that in mind, let's cast a light on some cool new **WW84** gear, some of which would make the daughter of destiny herself very happy indeed!

Reebok has released their **WW84** collection, which includes unisex shirts and socks, alongside leggings and low impact bras. However, the most attention-grabbing items are, naturally, their collection of Wonder Woman-inspired footwear. Our favourites are the classic leather shoes with Cheetah-inspired print (modelled on Kristen Wiig's baddie in the movie, briefly unveiled at this summer's DC FanDome) at £74.95, and the really cool toddlers' golden-winged shoes (based on the shiny new **Kingdom Come**-inspired golden armour Gal Gadot's hero dons in the movie) at £54.95, though adults get their own golden shoes in the much pricier Freestyle Hi Shoes at £159.95.

Jujube is also getting in on the action, as you can lasso yourself a huge selection of handbags, wallets, backpacks, and diaper bags, all in that strikingly beautiful rainbow colour spectrum that adorned the eye-catching first posters for the film, perfect for anyone who wants to be prepared when going out, be they working, walking, travelling or busy being a wonder-parent! While **Moshiqa**'s far more expensive ($950!) but cool looking **WW84** utility belt equips parents of the furred kind, in battle-ready dog walkers. It comes with compartments for everything from dog poo bags to your leash of justice (which is gold but won't compel your dogs to be honest with you!), and is a part of their range of luxury Wonder Woman-themed doggie items.

But finishing off with something a bit cheaper, we have the official **WW84: Wonder Woman Card Game** from Cryptozoic Entertainment. Due for release very shortly, it's a game for up to 4-players and is set to retail in the range of about £15-20. Pre-order your set at **Zatu Games**, **Thirsty Meeples** and **Total Cards**.





MERCH NEWS BY JACK BOTTOMLEY

QUOTH THE RAVEN

The Brave New Words Award has finally been announced! It's gone to Nisi Shawl for her work as the editor of **New Suns: Original Speculative Fiction by People of Color**. It's an amazing work, and we're very happy to give Nisi the award. We also launched the STARBURST Hero Award for Literature. The award is a stylised leather heater shield, something fit for a hero. This year the award went to Jenni Hill, a senior commissioning editor at Orbit Books who has repeatedly gone above and beyond for debut authors. Both awards were announced in the opening hours of Octocon, the Irish National Sci-Fi Convention, which was held entirely online this year. STARBURST's Literary Editor took a deep breath and then realised that he'd have to do it all again for 2021. Probably.

Elsewhere, the trailer for **The Watch** has dropped, and the reaction to it has not been good. It's meant to be an adaptation of the beloved Terry Pratchett books but doesn't bear any resemblance to them. It may be a great fantasy police procedural, but, alas, it's obviously a terrible adaptation of the source material. Terry's daughter Rhianna put it quite aptly via Twitter: "*Look, I think it's fairly obvious that @TheWatch shares no DNA with my father's Watch. This is neither criticism nor support. It is what it is.*"

Kids' book champions Nosy Crow has picked up the rights to Jason Lokesh Rohan's **S.T.E.A.L.T.H.** series, a 'superhero/superspy' set of books aimed at middle-school aged kids. Strange technologies, mysterious agencies, that sort of thing. It looks rather fab to us!



Hugo Award-winning author of **The Fifth Season**, N.K. Jemisin, has been selected as a MacArthur Foundation Fellow this year. Each 'genius grant' recipient receives a no-strings-attached "*stipend of $625,000, paid out in equal quarterly instalments over five years.*" It's a grant designed to support exceptional creative people, and in this case that is certainly true. Congratulations!

The organisers for World Fantasy 2020 have apologised for their original programming for the convention, which was, to be blunt, rubbish. Condescending and backwards, the original programme lacked anything of interest to new and diverse audiences. The World Fantasy Convention is a bit of a misnomer; it's mostly based in the USA, occasional appearing in the UK or Canada. The convention is entirely online and starts at the end of October.

Awards-wise, Ted Chiang's **Exhalation** took home the Neukom Institute Literary Arts Awards for Speculative Fiction in the Open category. The results for the British Fantasy Society's (BFS) short story competition have been announced: 1st Place goes to **Thought Surgery** by Richard Webb. 2nd Place goes to **Fairy Cattle**, by Patrick Creek, and 3rd Place went to **One Direction** by Beverley Haddon. These opportunities are fantastic for new authors - congratulations to the winners.

Namwali Serpell has won the Arthur C. Clarke award for her book **The Old Drift**, which is one of those sci-fi novels that people who don't read sci-fi claim isn't sci-fi. (Spoiler: it totally is, get over it.) The book tells the stories of three families over three generations. The tale moves from a colonial settlement near Victoria Falls at the turn of the 20th century, to Zambia's notorious Afronaut project, and then into the near future. It's a blend of the real and fantasy that lazy people call 'magical realism' and the rest of us just call fiction. It's a fascinating read and just the sort of thing we'd expect to win the Clarke. | EF

LITERATURE NEWS BY ED FORTUNE

year instead. **Destination** meanwhile has been pushed back an entire year and will now take place November 12th – 14th, 2021 at London's ExCel. The event was due to celebrate **Voyager**'s 25th anniversary, but will instead celebrate its 26th, which isn't a thing, but we'll go with it. It will doubtless feature the likes of Kate Mulgrew and Jeri Ryan being evasive when asked about **Prodigy** and **Picard** respectively, and Garratt Wang just being grateful he was invited.

Finally, congratulations to **Picard**'s makeup department, who won an Emmy for Outstanding Prosthetic Makeup. The show, which was up for five awards in total, lost out on the other four categories, as did **Short Treks** which lost out on Outstanding Short series to **Better Call Saul**. | IR

DC

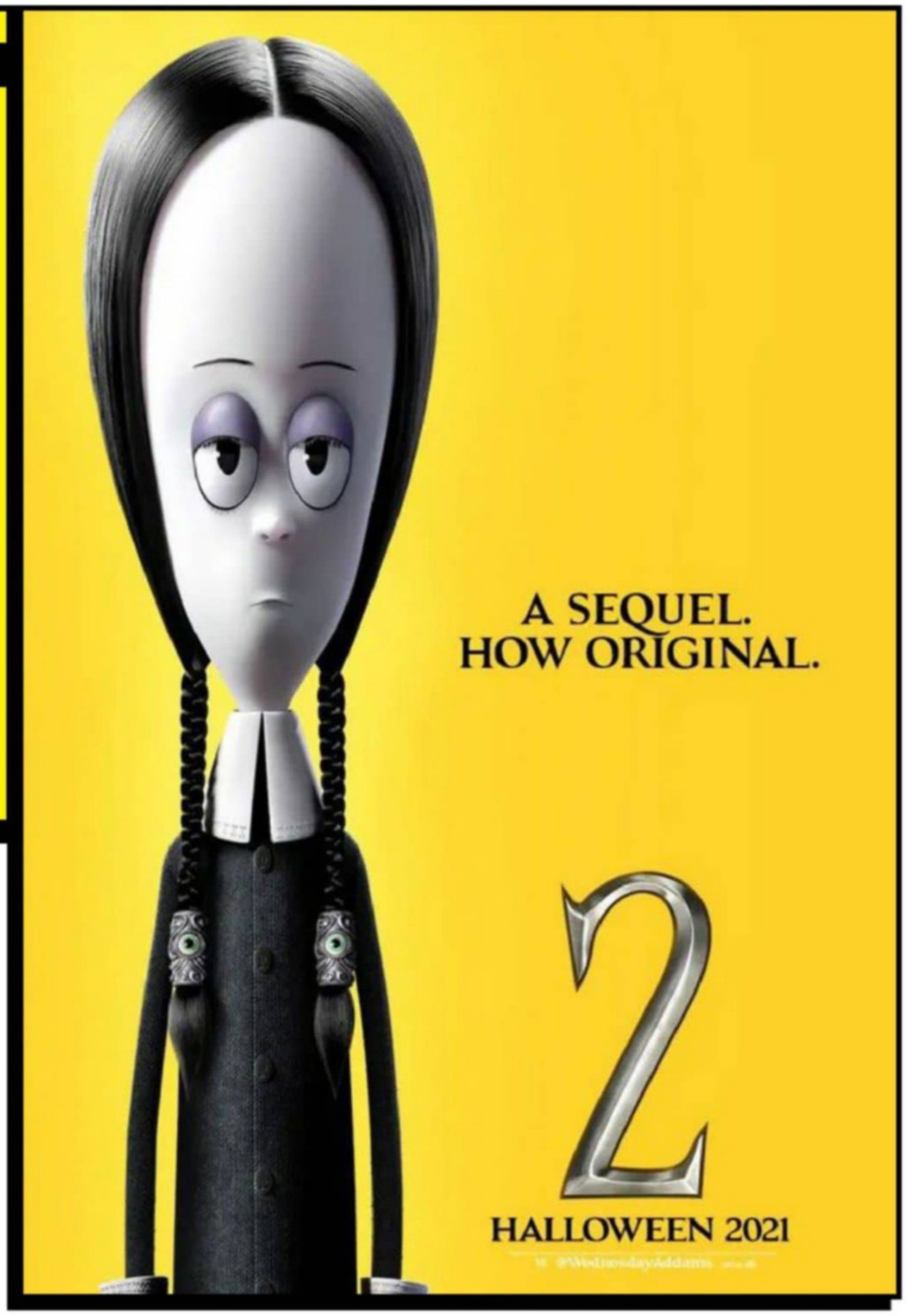
With our last issue bringing the news that Dwayne Johnson's **Black Adam** will feature the Justice Society – complete with **Masters of the Universe**'s Noah Centineo as Atom Smasher – we now know that **The Invisible Man**'s Aldis Hodge will be playing Carter Hall, aka Hawkman, in the film. That character debuted way back in 1940's **Flash Comic #1**, with Carter an archaeologist who is the reincarnation of Prince Khufu of ancient Egypt. With Nth metal in his possession, Carter has the abilities of enhanced strength and regeneration to go along with his badass wings. Previously, Hawkman has been played in live-action by Michael Shanks in **Smallville** and by Falk Hentschel in **DC's Legends of Tomorrow**.

Unfortunately for **Black Adam**, that long-gestating film (seriously, the film has been in some stage of development for way over a decade) is one of several DC Comics-centric pictures to have their release dates delayed. After an age, **Black Adam** was *finally* given a December 2021 release date - but that has now been completely axed, with the film yet to have a new date announced. With the current global situation causing so much uncertainty in the industry, Warner Bros has also moved **The Batman** from October 2021 to March 2022 and set new November 2022 and June 2023 release dates for **The Flash** and **Shazam! Fury of the Gods**, respectively. Up next on the DC front is **Wonder Woman 1984**, which has now been set for a December 26th festive release after originally being booked in for this past June. (By the time you're reading this, we wouldn't be surprised if the much-anticipated movie has been moved again!)

With numerous TV shows having been cancelled in recent months, there's now the hugely disappointing news that **Supergirl** is being brought to a close. Rather than being immediately axed,

POSTER MORTEM

With actors able to record dialogue from the inside of their closets these days, it's easy to see why animation is one area of filmmaking largely unaffected by this year's bullshit. That said, it was still somewhat of a surprise to see MGM so confidently announce the release date of **The Addams Family 2** - the sequel to their surprise 2019 animated hit – for October 8th, 2021. Creepy, kooky, spooky, and punctual too! The core cast of Charlize Theron, Oscar Isaac, Chloë Grace Moretz, Nick Kroll, Bette Midler, and Snoop Dogg are all returning, with the only exception being **Stranger Things'** Finn Wolfhard, who will be replaced by **Utopia**'s Javon 'Wanna' Walton as Pugsley. (The reason behind Wolfhard's sudden disappearance is a mystery befitting of Sheriff Jim Hopper himself!) Meanwhile, the ever-brilliant Bill Hader is a new addition to the franchise, voicing an original character named Cyrus. | KH



however, Melissa Benoist's Maid of Might will get to soar for one final season, with The CW confirming that **Supergirl**'s impending sixth season will be the series' last. Since debuting in 2015 over on CBS, **Supergirl** has gone on to become one of the very best genre offerings in recent memory. Despite a slightly wonky debut season, the show has turned itself into a phenomenal series based around capes 'n' tights, family, sexuality, racism, gender identity, and many more real-world issues. Seeing **Supergirl** come to an end will be a truly sad day, and here's hoping the show's 20-episode final year gives the Girl of Steel a fitting farewell.

Whereas **Supergirl** is entering its final season, there is good news in the shape of **Green Lantern** and **Peacemaker** shows on the way. We'd previously heard how HBO Max was to house the live-action **Green Lantern**, and now it's been revealed that **The LEGO Batman Movie**'s Seth Grahame-Smith – who also penned the **Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter** and **Pride and Prejudice and Zombies** novels – will be acting as showrunner. While Hal Jordan, John Stewart, and Kyle Rayner appear to be off the table right now, we *do* know that **Green Lantern** will feature the Jessica Cruz, Simon Baz, Guy Gardner, and Alan Scott GLs in addition to trainer Kilowog and hero-turned-villain Sinestro. Grahame-Smith will co-write the series with Arrowverse royalty Marc Guggenheim.

But wait, did you say **Peacemaker**? Indeed, we did. As played by John Cena, Peacemaker will be a part of James Gunn's **The Suicide Squad** – and this month brings word that this particular Task Force X member will be getting his own HBO Max show. Serving as a prequel of sorts, **Peacemaker** will see Cena back in the saddle as we get to see the character's origins. Not only will multiple-time WWE Champion Cena be involved, but Gunn himself is to write all eight episodes of **Peacemaker** as well as directing several of them. A relatively minor comic book rogue, Peacemaker is a villain who will do whatever it takes to obtain peace – which often sees him carrying out totally-not-peaceful things.

In other DC TV news, **Batwoman** has added Alex Morf – no stranger to comic book projects following roles in both **Gotham** and **Daredevil** – as the nefarious Victor Szasz. A sadistic murderer who carves into his own skin to mark each of his plentiful victims, Szasz is a comic book character who has been around since 1992. **James** frontman Tim Booth made a brief cameo as the character in **Batman Begins**, while Anthony Carrigan took on the role in **Gotham** and more recently, we saw Chris Messina as Mr Zsasz in **Birds of Prey**. For **Batwoman**'s second year, of course, Javicia Leslie's Ryan Wilder will be taking over the cape and cowl previously worn by Ruby Rose's Kate Kane. | AP

HOUSE OF THE DRAGON

As the **Game of Thrones** prequel series starts to amass its core cast, it's been announced that Paddy Considine will be leading the charge as King Viserys Targaryen I in **House of the Dragon**. One



View From THE WATCHTOWER

Let us kick off this issue's Watchtower with some quick coverage of the recent New York Comic Con. Similar to SDCC 2020 and the excellent DC FanDome, the organisers decided to replace the traditional convention with a solely online 4-day event. While there was a plethora of TV, film, and video game reveals, teasers and panels (including the first look at Prime Video's animated interpretation of Robert Kirkman's criminally overlooked title **Invincible**, as well as Hulu's **M.O.D.O.K.** animated series), two of the bigger announcements saw IDW reveal a **Transformers: Beast Wars** comic launching in February 2021, and Marvel confirming its new **Eternals** series has been delayed until next January – following the delay of the MCU's **The Eternals** to November 5th, 2021. However, NYCC wasn't the only source of new comic news this month, and the main publishers kept the new release reveals coming...

Up first is **Space Bastards** from Darick Robertson, the co-creator of **The Boys**, comes an irreverent science fiction story set in the far future where the Intergalactic Postal Service hands out delivery assignments like bounties, and its 'Postmen' aim to finish the delivery by any means necessary. With the second season of **The Boys** pleasing fans and critics alike, the timing of this interesting release is unlikely to be a pure coincidence.



Next up is **Crossover**. Due soon, this new book comes from publisher Image Comics and the creative team of **God Country** and **Thanos Lives** writer Donny Cates and artist Geoff Shaw. Being touted as mash-up in the vein of The Avengers meets **Cloverfield**, the story focuses on Ellie, a comic shop owner who must come to terms with the fallout of a major comic book story that starts to bleed into the real world. With Cates being on fire of late and him promising something readers haven't seen before, this is definitely a title worth keeping an eye on.

Due mid-November, to intentionally coincide with the result of the US Presidential elections, **The Recount** is a new series from Scout Comics from the creative team of writer Jonathan Hedrick and artist Gabriel Ibarra Nunez. The comic tells the story of the US being plunged into civil war following the assassination of the President, who was seen by many as being dishonest. Hopefully this isn't too prophetic...

The final issue of J.J. Abrams' much publicised run on **Spider-Man** will at long last see the light of day on the November 25th, after being originally solicited for release all the way back in January! In a last piece of release date reshuffling, the upcoming inaugural comic book from everyone's favourite actor Keanu Reeves has been delayed. Readers will be able get hold of **BRZRKR** # 1 – a violent tale about an 'immortal warrior's fight through the ages' – on February 17th following the replacement of the originally scheduled artist Alessandro Vitti with Ron Garney.

COMIC BOOK NEWS BY JAMES BRIDCUT

of Britain's finest actors of the modern era, Considine is best known for such essential cult pictures as **A Room for Romeo Brass**, **Dead Man's Shoes**, **Hot Fuzz**, **The Death of Stalin**, and can currently be seen in HBO's **The Third Day**. Where Viserys is concerned, he's described as "*a warm, kind, and decent man... but good men do not necessarily make for great kings*". **House of the Dragon** will showcase the rise and fall of the Targaryens, taking place 300 years before the events of **Game of Thrones**. Based on George R.R. Martin's **Fire & Blood**, Martin and **Colony**'s Ryan Condal are the minds behind the series. | AP

WILLY FOG

Yes, *that* Willy Fog. From Apolo Films, a new **Around the World with Willy Fog** movie is in the works. Apolo also happens to be the group behind the in-development **Dogtanian and the Muskehounds** picture that was announced in February, and this **Willy Fog** offering will likewise be a 90-minute CG adventure. Loosely based on the 1873 Jules Verne novel, the original **Around the World with Willy Fog** was a cartoon series that ran for a total of 26 episodes in 1983 (or 1984 for UK viewers). Seeing a bunch of anthropomorphic characters embark on all kinds of antics across the globe, the series remains a huge favourite of so many to this very day – not to mention it has one of those glorious theme tunes that will be stuck in your head for days at a time! | AP

MARVEL

Adding further credence to the concept of the multiverse existing in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, these past few weeks have seen both Benedict Cumberbatch and Jamie Foxx join the to-be-titled **Spider-Man: Far from Home** follow-up. Cumberbatch will be picking up his Doctor Strange role alongside Tom Holland's Peter Parker, but the juicier part of this story is that Foxx will be reprising his Electro role from **The Amazing Spider-Man 2**. Foxx has suggested that his Electro will look very different this time out when compared to his blue-skinned **ASM2** outing, and it's yet to be confirmed whether this will be the one and the same Max Dillon or a different incarnation of the electricity-powered rogue. With the idea of the multiverse already alluded to by Mysterio in **Spider-Man: Far From Home**, not to mention how the next outing for Cumberbatch's Sorcerer Supreme is titled **Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness**, many are rightly or wrongly presuming that Foxx's Electro is indeed the Electro of old arriving into the MCU from an alternative Earth – which in turn



opens up questions about an appearance from Andrew Garfield's Spider-Man or maybe even Toby Maguire's Spidey down the line. At present, this sequel is set for December 2021, while **Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness** is booked in for March 2022.

While those release dates have indeed been set, it may be that both pictures end up being pushed back by the time all is said and done. That has now once again been the case for Scarlett Johansson's **Black Widow**, which was originally due to hit the silver screen this past May. Initially moved to a November 6th slot, that release date has now been adjusted to May 7th, 2021. As a direct result of that, **Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings** has been moved to July 9th, and **The Eternals** to November 5th.

On the small screen, the biggest Marvel news of the day is that Disney+'s **Ms. Marvel** has found its titular Kamala Khan in the shape of newcomer Iman Vellani. In the comic book realm, shape-shifting Kamala took on the Ms. Marvel moniker in 2014 after Carol Danvers had dropped that mantle in favour of becoming the new Captain Marvel. **Bad Boys for Life**'s Adil El Arbi and Bilall Fallah have signed on to direct several episodes of **Ms. Marvel**, and Bisha K. Ali – best known for being part of the writing staff for the **Four Weddings and a Funeral** TV show – is on board to serve as showrunner. **Ms. Marvel** is just one of many new Marvel-driven TV shows on the way, of course, which takes us nicely to the next series on Disney+'s plate...

...with **She-Hulk** also finding its lead in the form of **Orphan Black**'s Tatiana Maslany. There's also rumblings that Mark Ruffalo's Green Goliath could make an appearance or two alongside his cousin She-Hulk, aka Jennifer Walters. A lawyer by trade, Walters is a character who was in desperate need of a blood transfusion to save her life. And wouldn't you know it, the only person whose blood was compatible was Bruce Banner – which, in turn, results in Jennifer developing her own gamma-based powers and abilities. **Rick & Morty**'s Jessica Goa is **She-Hulk**'s showrunner,

PIXEL JUICE

The big gaming news this month comes from Sony and Microsoft, as both have revealed the launch info for their upcoming consoles. The PS5 will launch on November 12th in the US and Japan, with us Brits getting it on the 19th. The digital-only edition costs $399, with the price going up to $499 if you want a Blu-ray disc drive. We imagine that those numbers will stay the same in the UK with just the currency changed. The Xbox Series X, meanwhile, comes in at the same price as the PS5 that has a disc drive. But interestingly, their digital-only model, the Series S, costs $100 less than Sony's equivalent. Both of Microsoft's consoles will arrive with retailers on November 10th, giving them a slight jump on Sony.

Of course, new consoles bring with them a bunch of big moves by the major players; Microsoft hit hardest with its announcement that it's acquired Bethesda. Getting their hands on the makers of the **Fallout** and **Elder Scrolls** games is a massive coup for Microsoft and suggests they're taking console exclusivity more seriously this generation. However, those looking forward to Bethesda's upcoming **Deathloop** and **Ghostwire: Tokyo** will find that they're still exclusive to PS5. What comes after is anybody's guess, though.

Sticking with Microsoft, we also got the news that **Yakuza: Like a Dragon**, will be an Xbox exclusive for six months. The game, which is an RPG offshoot of the regular **Yakuza** games, looks like an interesting proposition. But what's more important here is that **Yakuza** has been linked with Sony ever since the first game came out on PS2.

Sony certainly hasn't taken all of this news lying down. At their recent PlayStation 5 event, they revealed that players can expect a new entry in the rebooted **God of War** series in 2021. We don't have many details yet, but the ending of the 2018 **God of War** may give



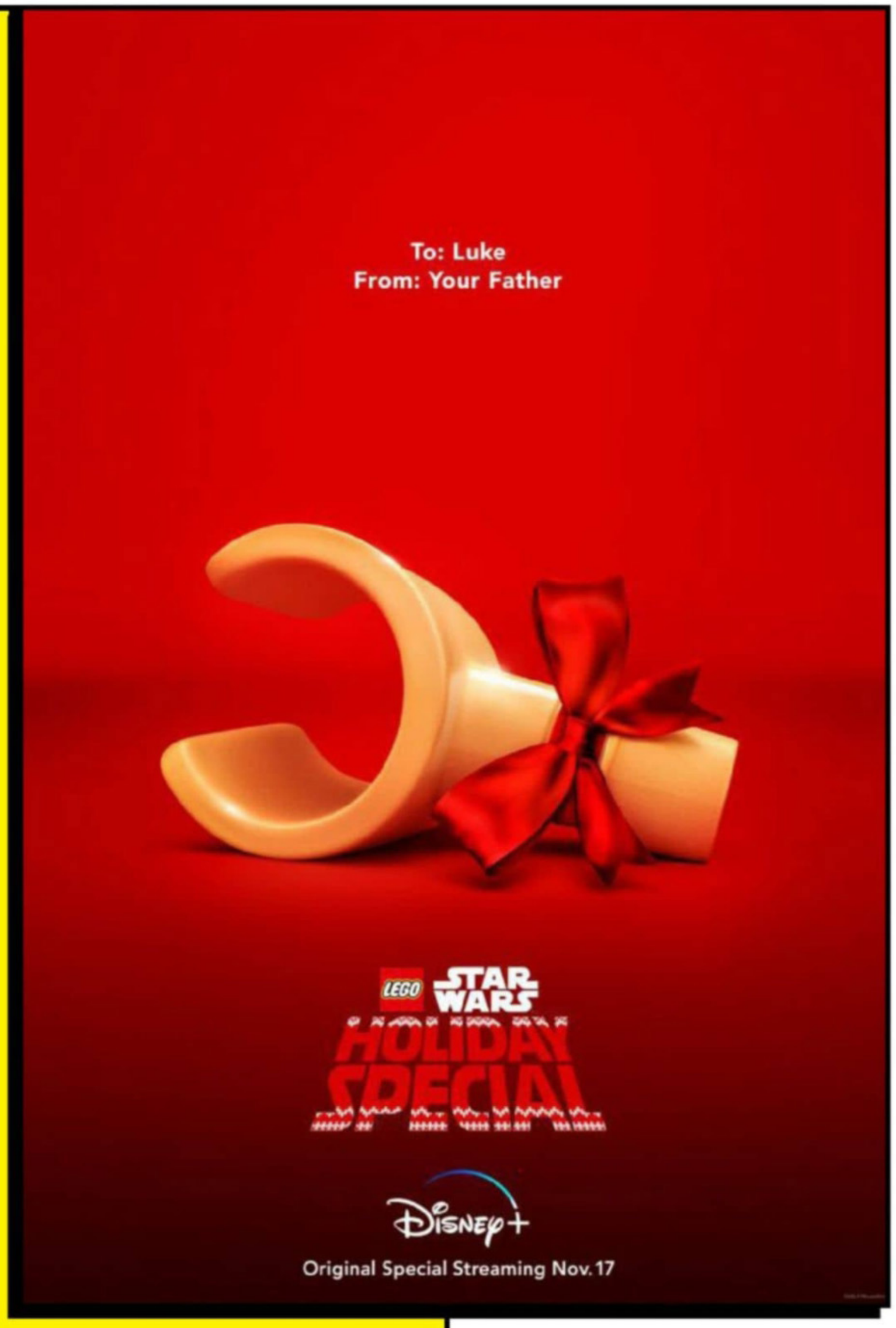
us a hint as to the direction of the new game, which is subtitled **Ragnarok**. At the same event, they also unveiled **Final Fantasy XVI** to the audience. Again, we don't have many details beyond what we saw in the trailer, but we do know that the game looks gorgeous. Hopefully, the story matches up to the visuals. Square Enix has also made no mention of the game coming to PC or Xbox, which suggests that the latest **Final Fantasy** is a Sony exclusive, at least for the time being.

Moving away from the console wars, we have the distressing news that **Marvel's Avengers** dropped to less than 1,000 players on Steam last month. That's pretty bad news for an online-focused game and it shows just how much of a disappointment the title's been so far.

Finally, Sony also announced a remaster of Insomniac's brilliant **Spider-Man** for PS5. But for some reason, the game features a brand-new face for Peter Parker. Leaving aside the pointlessness of creating a remaster for a game that's barely a couple of years old, this face swapping decision left many gamers scratching their heads. The game will be a launch title for the PS5 and you can also get it if you buy the Ultimate Edition of **Spider-Man: Miles Morales**.

VIDEO GAME NEWS BY LEE PRICE

Oh, how we all laughed when **The Mandalorian** creator Jon Favreau joked that he'd like to do a new **Star Wars Holiday Special** for Disney+. A year later, and the joke's on us - because LEGO's only gone and beaten Favs to the punch! Paying homage to the original (we won't go into detail on the 1978 travesty, as our fantastic feature on page 16 tells you everything you need to know - and many things you'll want to immediately forget), **The LEGO Star Wars Holiday Special** sees Chewbacca once again heading home to celebrate Life Day with his Wookiee buddies on Kashyyyk. In lieu of the suspiciously zonked out trio of Carrie Fisher, Mark Hamill, and Harrison Ford to accompany him, Chewie is this time joined by sequel era favourites such as Rey, Finn, BB-8, and Poe. Alongside this newly revealed poster comes fresh details on what else fans can expect to see in the eagerly-awaited programme, including the news that Kelly Marie Tran is reprising Rose Tico in what is promised to be a significant role (addressing the backlash from fans after the character was largely cut from **The Rise of Skywalker**). Also back in the fold are legacy characters Lando Calrissian and C-3PO, played by Billy Dee Williams and Anthony Daniels respectively, while **The Clone Wars'** Matt Lanter will return to voice Anakin Skywalker. That's right, even though this adventure is set post-**TROS**, we'll also be dipping into **Star Wars** history to revisit characters of old thanks to a time travel subplot which sees Rey hopping between past and present courtesy of an ancient Jedi MacGuffin. (Maybe she could use it to drop by on a younger Luke and save him the trauma of wanting to get frisky with his sister.)



Meanwhile in live-action news, it appears that the cameras are about to roll on the long-awaited **Rogue One** spin-off revolving around Rebel Intelligence officer Cassian Andor, with a rumoured November 4th shoot date. Expect an official announcement very soon as to what this new Disney+ TV series will be called, but the current money is on the perfectly functional though rather underwhelming **Star Wars: Andor**. Behind the scenes, showrunner Tony Gilroy will no longer be on hand to direct the opening three episodes, but before we start getting concerned that this is yet *another* last-minute fallout that has blighted Disney's **Star Wars** productions from the get-go (see Josh Trank, Phil Lord & Chris Miller, David Benioff & D.B. Weiss, and Colin Trevorrow), we've been reassured that it was a COVID-related issue instead, with the **Rogue One** co-writer favouring not to travel from New York to London during a pandemic. Probably wise. Stepping into his shoes will be Toby Haynes, who was on the roster already, but has now been brought forward. Haynes is best known to us for his work on **Doctor Who**, **Sherlock**, and **Black Mirror**, for which he helmed the fantastic *USS Callister* in 2017. | KH

and the plan right now is for the series to premiere some time in 2022.

Samuel L. Jackson will be donning the eye patch yet again, as we now know that Disney+ will *also* be delivering a live-action **Nick Fury** show. **Mr. Robot**'s Kyle Bradstreet is to write and executive produce the series, with Jackson himself also acting as an executive producer. No plot details have been released just yet for **Nick Fury**, although there are so many possibilities where the Fury character is concerned. In terms of the current MCU landscape, Fury was last seen somewhere up in the stars during **Spider-Man: Far from Home**. Jackson's Nick Fury first turned up during the credits of 2008's **Iron Man** – going on to appear in 11 of the 23 MCU films to date. Alongside **Ms.**

Marvel, **She-Hulk**, and **Nick Fury**, Disney+ also has **WandaVision**, **The Falcon and the Winter Soldier**, **Loki**, and **Hawkeye** as TV shows on the horizon. | AP

RESIDENT EVIL

Having maybe heard a few hush-hush details on the picture earlier this year when we spoke to director Johannes Roberts, the loose plot and cast of his **Resident Evil** reboot have now been revealed. To be set in Raccoon City in 1998, this new offering will be based on the events of the first two entries in the **Resident Evil** video game franchise. As for the cast, **Crawl**'s Kaya Scodelario is playing Claire Redfield, **Upload**'s Robbie Amell is Chris Redfield, **Ant-Man and the Wasp**'s Hannah John-Kamen is Jill Valentine, **Zombieland: Double Tap**'s Avan Jogia is Leon S. Kennedy, **The Umbrella Academy**'s Tom Hopper is Albert Wesker, and **Captain America: The First Avenger**'s Neal McDonough is William Birkin. In case you hadn't picked up on it yet, this **Resident Evil** will be vastly different to the largely original story of the Milla Jovovich-starring **Resident Evil** movie franchise that served up six movies between 2002 and 2016.

That's not all for Claire Redfield and Leon S. Kennedy though, for a CGI animated series titled **Resident Evil: Infinite Darkness** will also focus on those two franchise favourites. Currently pegged to hit Netflix in 2021, **Infinite Darkness** is being executive produced by Capcom's Hiroyuki Kobayashi, animated by 3D studio Quebico, and produced by TMS Entertainment. Promising to give fans a **Resident Evil** world "*unlike anything seen before*", **Infinite Darkness** is not to be confused with the live-action **Resident Evil** Netflix show that will centre on the daughters of Albert Wesker. | AP

NIGHTBREED

After years of speculation, Clive Barker's **Nightbreed** is finally being turned into a TV series. As revealed by Barker himself, **Trick 'r Treat** and **Godzilla: King of the Monsters** director Michael Dougherty is to develop and direct a **Nightbreed** series – with Barker currently at work on putting together an outline for the show. Adapted from his **Cabal** novella, Barker wrote and directed 1990's **Nightbreed**. In that tale, troubled Aaron Boone finds himself drawn to a strange, mythical place called Midan. While this landscape is full of friendly monsters hiding from humanity, the presence of a serial killer looms large. | AP

Stories by ANDREW POLLAND, KRIS HEYS, IAIN ROBERTSON, and KIERON MOORE

A round-up of what not to miss this month on... horrorchannel

by Martin Unsworth

NOVEMBER 2ND
ALL CHEERLEADERS DIE (2013)
Lucky McKee (**The Woman**) and Chris Sivertson's remake of their 2001 film is a gloriously badass college comedy horror. Full of bitchy cheerleaders and gory supernatural terror. What's not to like?

NOVEMBER 6TH
THE HALLOW (2015)
The Nun director Corin Hardy's debut feature is a terrifying tale of a family living in a remote house in Ireland who are plagued by demonic creatures. Plenty of brooding atmosphere and edge-of-the-seat tension.

NOVEMBER 15TH
THE BLOB (1958)
A rare horror appearance from Steve McQueen is one recommendation for this classic piece of cinema. Another is the groovy theme tune. Even if you've never seen it (now's your chance to remedy that), you'll no doubt be aware of the oozing monster that devours everything in its path. Unmissable.

NOVEMBER 12TH
NIGHT OF THE CREEPS (1986)
A gloriously schlocky '80s film from writer/director Fred Dekker (**The Monster Squad**), this is the one in which Tom Atkins tells the prom girls their dates are here... but they're dead! Watch for several of the character's surnames - they're named after famous horror directors.

NOVEMBER 26TH
BEYOND THE GATES (2016)
A deadly video tape board game takes two brothers into a different world and perhaps holds the key to their father's disappearance. Horror royalty Barbara Crampton is the game master, while Graham Skipper (**Bliss**), Chase Williamson (**Victor Crowley**), and Brea Grant (**The Stylist**) are playing along.

NOVEMBER 25TH
MANIAC (2012)
The remake of the ultra-sleazy classic, this version is all shot from the killer's point-of-view. Elijah Wood is the mannequin-obsessed lunatic in this reimagining that loses none of the original's power.

For small screen thrills, **Star Trek** continues with episodes from **The Original Series** scheduled throughout the month, and **The Next Generation** reaches its sixth season. You can also go back to the beginning of popular series **The Time Tunnel** and **Space: 1999**, while **Andromeda** enters its second season.



Horror Channel is available on Sky 317, Virgin 149, Freeview 68, Freesat 138, and TalkTalk 487

MANDO 101

BY KRIS HEYS



Having helped successfully launch Disney+ and delighting audiences around the world, Lucasfilm's first steps into the larger world of live-action STAR WARS television is about to return to our screens with a feverishly anticipated follow-up season. How did the producers of THE MANDALORIAN pull off such a monster hit? Who's new to their clan this year? What can we expect to see in SEASON 2? And how in the heck are we going to afford all the awesome Mando merch heading our way?! For answers to all these questions and more, read on for 101 THINGS EVERY MANDALORIAN FAN NEEDS TO KNOW....

1 *The Mandalorian* creator Jon Favreau pitched the show to Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy in 2017 while he was directing *The Lion King*.

2 Enthused by the breakthrough VFX techniques he'd been using to bring Simba and company to life, themselves extensions on what he'd employed on his previous film, *The Jungle Book*, Favreau was convinced that by combining game engine technology and virtual sets, he could bring the *Star Wars* galaxy to the small screen at a budget appropriate for TV...

3 ...a problem George Lucas had encountered back in 2010, when after supervising fifty scripts for what he'd hoped would be the franchise's first live-action series *Star Wars: Underworld* (itself also bounty hunter-centred), he paused production until technology could catch up. Looks like it eventually did. And then some. (Lucas was always prophetic when it came to this kind of stuff!)

4 The cumulative budget for Season 1's 8-episode, 315-minute runtime was $100 million, while *The Rise of Skywalker*, coming in at 141-minutes, cost Disney $275 million. In short, *The Mandalorian* was a bargain!

5 Another savvy production measure involves the casting of the Mandalorian himself. While the distinctive drawl of Din Djarin (Mando's real name) is all his own, star Pedro Pascal is just one of several people under the helmet, with actors Brendan Wayne and Lateef Crowder featuring prominently...

6 ...so prominently, in fact, that director Bryce Dallas Howard didn't get the opportunity to even work with Pascal on the set of her *Chapter 4* episode, *Sanctuary*.

7 Stunt double Brendan Wayne is the grandson of legendary actor John


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Wayne and, understandable given his heritage, is primarily relied upon for action scenes involving guns.

8 Martial artist Lateef Crowder, meanwhile, steps in when Din can't rely on something so uncivilised as a blaster and has to get down and dirty with good ol' fashioned fisticuffs!

9 Getting handy in another way was Salacious Crumb designer Tony McVey, who was tasked with recreating and operating a new Kowakian monkey-lizard puppet based on the original specs from *Return of the Jedi*. You can see the poor fella waiting to be cooked on a spit in Chapter 1's Nevarro marketplace. (The monkey-lizard, not Tony.)

10 McVey also helped build the models used for several stop-motion shots of the blurrgs (those ugly walking tadpole-looking creatures ridden by Mando and his Ugnaught buddy Kuiil), before they were animated by Stoopid Buddy Stoodios, the team behind Adult Swim's *Robot Chicken*.

11 Also assisting the main production of Season 1 were members of the 501st Legion, a worldwide fan organisation who are known for building their own screen-accurate costumes, most notably Imperial stormtroopers. When the final two episodes of Season 1 demanded more Imps than the budget could stretch to, the 501st were drafted in to swell the ranks on screen. Accustomed to doing charity appearances and the like, they only found out they were going to be in a *Star Wars* production when they turned up on the morning of the shoot!

12 Utilising more existing props in prudent ways, the X-wing on display in Disney theme-parks' *Galaxy's Edge* area was borrowed to film the three cockpits of the New Republic pilots in *Chapter 6*: *The Prisoner*.

13 It's widely known that Taika Waititi pulled double-duty on the show, helming the Season 1 finale and also voicing assassin/nurse droid IG-11, but his fellow directors Rick Famuyiwa, Deborah Chow, and Dave Filoni also made appearances in front of the camera too, playing the aforementioned X-wing pilots.

14 Not to be left out, Jon Favreau himself adds an impressive 'third' *Star Wars* character to his credits after *Solo*'s Rio Durant and *The Clone Wars*' Pre Vizla, providing the voice for fellow Mandalorian Paz Vizla. Despite sharing a voice and surname, canonically Paz Vizla is no relation to the former. (Yes, we're confused too...)

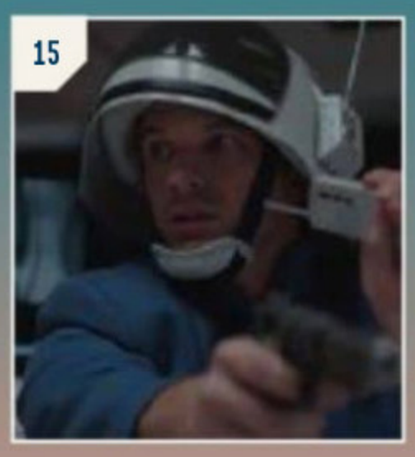
15 Matt Lanter, better known as the voice behind Anakin Skywalker in all 133-episodes of *The Clone Wars*, appears as Davan, the New Republic soldier stationed in *Chapter 6*'s droid-patrolled prison ship. Lanter's longevity as Skyguy is most certainly not repeated with this character!


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16 Partly responsible for poor Davan's early demise is a Devaronian by the name of Burg, played by Clancy Brown. The prolific actor's vocals might already be familiar to *Star Wars* fans, as Brown lent them to Mandalorian Montross in the 2002 video game *Star Wars: Bounty Hunter*, Maul's long-lost brother Savage Opress in *The Clone Wars*, and Ryder Azadi in *Rebels*. As cool as those roles are, let's face it, he'll still always be best known for Mr Krabs in *SpongeBob SquarePants*.

17 If Burg looked familiar, it's because his distinctive Devaronian species (above) was first glimpsed amongst the patrons of the Mos Eisley Cantina all the way back in 1977 original. On the set of *Star Wars* he was simply referred to as 'the devil guy' by his designer, make-up effects master Rick Baker, but he's since been canonised as military leader Kardue'sai'Malloc, aka 'The Butcher of Montellian Serat'. We prefer Devil Guy.

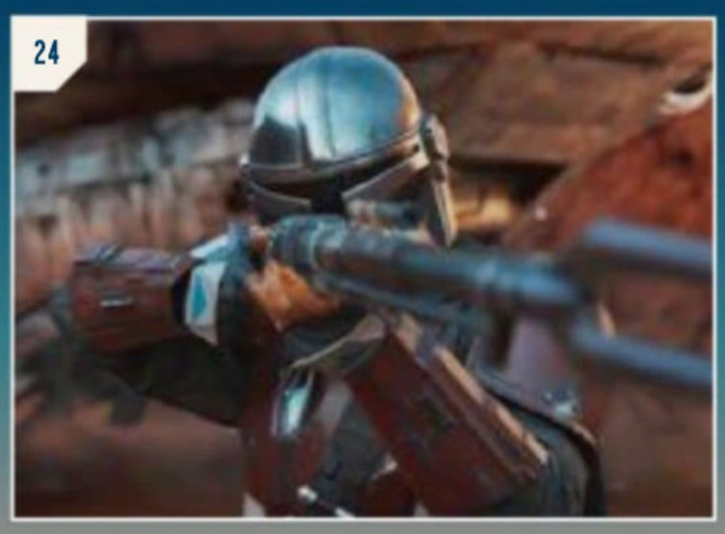
18 Of course, *The Mandalorian*'s fifth episode, *The Gunslinger*, saw us revisit Chalmun's Spaceport Cantina on screen for the first time since *A New Hope*, and although nowhere near as rowdy as we remember it (perhaps this was a weekday), there was still a familiar face to be seen in the form of EV-9D9. The sadistic droid was last featured in *Return of the Jedi* as Jabba the Hutt's Chief of Cyborg Operations, where she doled out cruelty upon her fellow droid from deep within the palace's dungeons. However, since the death of the vile gangster at the hands of the Huttslayer (the badass nickname Leia Organa acquired post-strangulation), Eve-Ninedenine has had to find a new career as a lowly bartender in this notoriously dangerous drinking hole. Serves her right!

19 Not that is was remotely noticeable, but EV-9D9 was actually voiced here by none other than Mark Hamill himself.

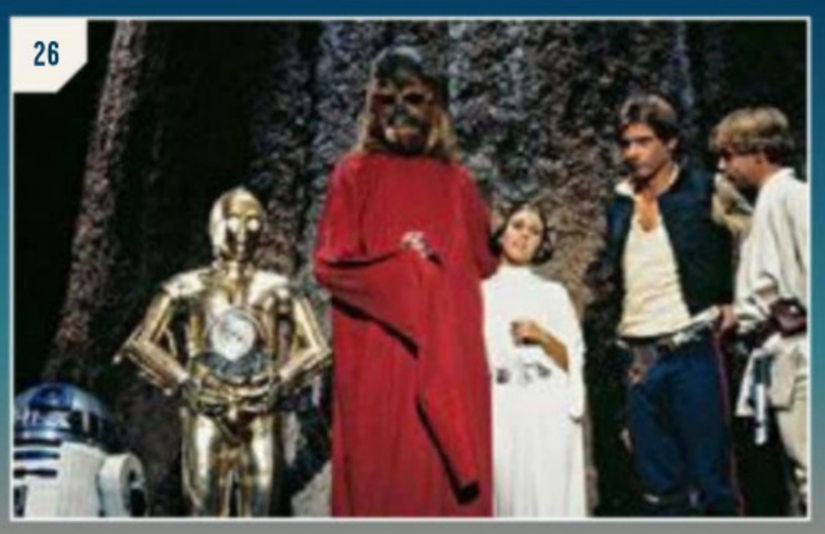
20 Recognise that red and white astromech in the same scene? You should. That's R5-D4, the droid that malfunctioned (albeit on purpose – it was a whole secret deal with R2-D2) when being purchased by Uncle Owen and Luke Skywalker in *A New Hope*. After the slaughter of his Jawa owners at the hands of stormtroopers, he escaped the confines of the sandcrawler and rode off into the (twin) sunset to fill his recently wiped memory with adventures anew. Given he's still rolling around this wretched hive of scum and villainy nine years later with nary a tickle with a wet-wipe, it sadly doesn't look like the benevolent droid got very far.

21 Courtesy of *Chapter 2*'s sojourn to Arvala-7, we now know Jawas aren't only found on Tatooine. How the cheeky scavengers ever got off-planet with those "*crawling fortresses*" of theirs remains a mystery for another time.

22 The desert world of Arvala-7 is best traversed atop a blurrg, the beasts









of burden referenced eleven entries ago. These creatures were originally designed for *The Empire Strikes Back*, but would eventually make their debut in the made-for-TV movie *The Battle for Endor* in 1985.

23 Post-Ewok adventure, the ugly buggers have popped up in *The Clone Wars* and *Rebels*, and have been referenced in several pieces of *Star Wars* media, from the *Aftermath* novels to the video game *Battlefront II*.

24 *Battle for Endor* is far from the unlikeliest *Star Wars* project *The Mandalorian* has drawn from, with 1978's *Holiday Special* featuring the first appearance of Mando's unique sniper rifle, the Amban phase-pulse blaster.

25 In fact, the infamously unwatchable, infinitely regrettable variety show actually featured the very first on-screen Mandalorian - debuting Boba Fett two years before *The Empire Strikes Back*, albeit in (pretty ropey) animated form.

26 It also introduced us to the concept of Life Day, a holiday originating from Chewbacca's home planet of Kashyyyk. Having been referenced by the unnamed Mythrol bounty in *Chapter 1*, Life Day is now canon, so mark your calendars (November 17th), and ready those robes!

27 Equally as goofy is the inclusion of a 'camtono'. In a blink-and-you'll miss it moment from *The Empire Strikes Back*, one of the citizens of Cloud City is seen evacuating with an object clutched tightly under his arm that was instantly recognisable as a store-bought, largely unmodified ice-cream maker! Though it became the subject of much light-hearted ribbing, *The Mandalorian* has now canonised the object as a camtono, a portable security safe that, in this instance, is used to transport an obscene amount of immensely valuable Beskar steel.

28 The very first mention of Beskar steel came in a 2006 issue of the magazine *Star Wars Insider*, as part of an article covering Mandalorian culture.

29 The Bounty Hunters' Guild, meanwhile, made its first canon appearance only relatively recently, in *Ezra's Gamble*, a 2014 *Rebels* prequel novel by Ryder Windham.

30 Relegated to non-canon when all EU material was rebranded *Legends* in 2014, the ancient mythosaur once ridden by Mandalorian warriors of old is now legit again thanks to this show, 38-years after the creature was introduced in a 1982 comic book. A mythosaur skull can be seen on the wall of The Armorer's lair and, most recognisably, features on Boba Fett's armour.

31 Video games have also contributed to the world of *The Mandalorian*, with *Chapter 7*'s flamethrower-wielding incinerator trooper having made its bow in 2008's *The Force Unleashed*.

32 Such deep cuts aren't just reserved for *Star Wars* media – the fondly-remembered 3.75"-scale Kenner Imperial Troop Transport vehicle from their 1979 toy-line went from plastic to real life (kinda) in the same episode, *The Reckoning*.

33 Did somebody mention toys? Get out the Calamari Flan, because there's a wealth of most wanted Mando merch heading our way over the coming months, including the stunning 3.75"-scale Razor Crest from Hasbro's Vintage Collection. The item, too costly to produce for regular mass market sale, has been made possible by the toy company's crowdfunding initiative, HasLab, and extremely limited numbers can currently be pre-ordered in the UK





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exclusively through Zavvi at an eye-watering £349.99.

34 So successful was HasLab's Razor Crest crowdfunder that it breezed both stretch goals, with 10,000 backers easily unlocking additional details to the set including a removeable Escape Pod and The Child action figure complete with hover pram.

35 The Razor Crest is also newly available in LEGO form, and will set you back £119.99.

36 Or how about a new 1073-piece LEGO rendition of The Child himself?

37 Making up for lost time due to Disney's commendable decision to keep The Child under wraps until the airing of *The Mandalorian*'s first episode, collectors and toy-lovers alike are now spoilt for choice. Our favourites include Mattel's nicely-detailed 11" plush, which can be picked up for less than £30...

38 ...or, if you prefer your toys to move and make realistic noises when you pat them on their wrinkled little head, then for just twice that price you can now get your hands on Hasbro's walking, talking Animatronic Edition.



39 For the most realistic rendition though, look no further than the incredibly detailed Hot Toys life-size version of The Child, available to pre-order for £499.99. That's a lot of bounty pucks!

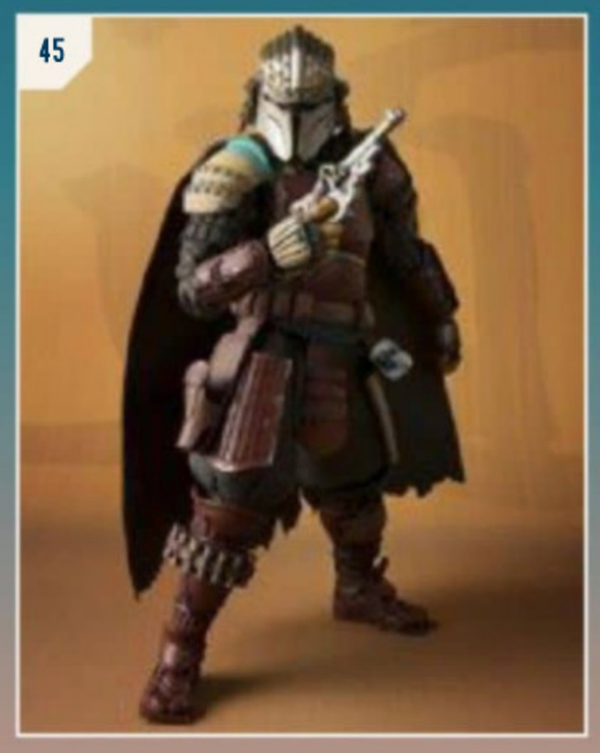
40 Prefer to spend your time playing board games instead, but still want to show your love for our new little green friend? Then *Monopoly: The Child Edition* is on sale now!

41 As is a themed *Operation*, also from Hasbro Gaming. (Don't worry, the game doesn't make you rummage around Baby Yoda's guts, rather just carefully pluck frogs and the like from his pram. Phew!)

42 Of course, Funko continues to produce more product than even George Lucas himself could afford to keep up with, including a wonderful new *Pop! Moment* diorama of Mando and The Child strolling across the barren planes of Arvala-7.











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43 We're not sure why a *Mandalorian*-branded Polaroid Now i-Type Instant Camera needs to exist, but it does!

44 A screen accurate Mando helmet produced using a 3D digital scan of the original prop, however; well, take our money! (Sign up now at anovos.com)

45 While Samurai cinema has always been a heavy spiritual influence on *Star Wars*, makers Premium Bandai has taken that idea and ran with it, producing a remarkable 'Ronin Mandalorian' figure for their Meisho Movie Realization series, available May 2021.

46 If you fancy wielding a *Mandalorian*-influenced blade of your own, you'll most certainly be interested to learn that Hasbro have just released an affordable toy replica of Moff Gideon's legendary Darksaber itself, complete with electronic sound and lighting effects!

47 Fun fact: despite *many* licensees producing T-shirts, few, if any, have managed to design a piece of clothing any self-respecting fan of *The Mandalorian* would be comfortable wearing, instead largely favouring dated Internet memes that make absolutely no kriffing sense whatsoever.

48 Although Ludwig Göransson's unique score was released via Apple Music and Spotify streaming services episode-by-episode (thank you, Disney!), fans of physical media are being treated to a one-time-only pressing of the complete Season 1 score in a beautiful deluxe 8-LP box-set, limited to 3,500 copies, from Mondo.

49 Göransson netted the show one of its *seven* Emmy wins in this year's ceremony (of its fifteen nominations!), his exhilarating work earning it the award for Outstanding Music Composition for a Series.

50 Its other six Emmy victories were in the categories of Sound Mixing, Sound Editing, Special Visual Effects, Stunt Coordination, Cinematography, and, finally, the award for Outstanding Production Design for a Narrative Program.

51 A narrative programme of another kind is the recently announced wave of literary tie-ins heading our way soon, including a new original novel (and audiobook) by celebrated genre author Adam Christopher...

52 ...a new Little Golden Book for the younglings (or younglings at heart) entitled *This is the Way*...

53 ...*The Mandalorian: Allies & Enemies* for slightly older readers...

54 ...a dedicated *Visual Guide* once again put together by the keeper of the canon, *Star Wars* Story Group linchpin Pablo Hidalgo...





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55 ...a Junior Novel retelling the events of Season 1...

56 ...at least two news comic book titles from Marvel and IDW...

57 ...and Abrams Books' *The Art of Star Wars* series will continue this December with a new release centred on the show's first season. As ever, this lavish coffee table book will lovingly spotlight the stunning concept art that fuels Lucasfilm's live-action productions...

58 ...and sometimes fuels nightmares! Turns out The Child took some trial and error in the design stage (see above), and wasn't always the cutest thing on the planet. Far from it!

59 The Child is brought to life predominantly through puppetry, taking five people to operate.

60 Although CGI is far cheaper than a practical effect, Disney's *Star Wars* productions continue to favour the latter, honouring the magical aesthetic of the original movies.

61 One of The Child's biggest fans is his co-star Werner Herzog, who plays The Client. So impressed with the puppet was the legendary filmmaker, that he actively discouraged producers from using *any* CGI, calling them "cowards".

62 Commonly known as Baby Yoda, the character was introduced as The Asset, before becoming canonised as The Child (for now). On set, however, he was referred to by the crew as The Being.

63 Regular visitor to the set, The Maker himself George Lucas, has never previously allowed anybody to explore the origin of The Child's species.

64 There have only ever been two more examples of this species across all of canon and Legends - Grand Master Yoda, of course, and the elusive Yaddle, who you'll have seen sat on the Jedi Council in *The Phantom Menace*.

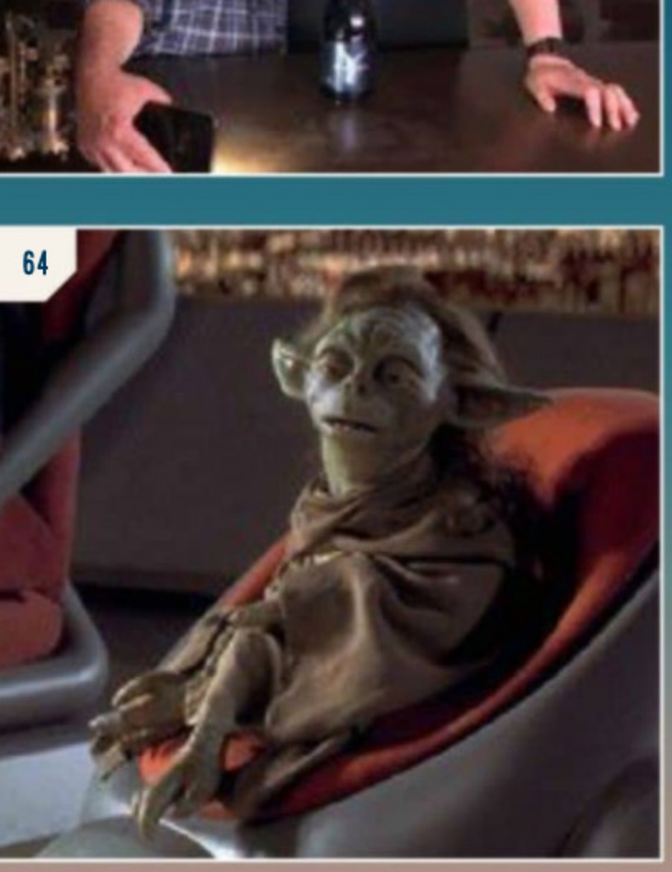
65 Mysteriously never seen since, it's only known that Yaddle left the Jedi Council after the Battle of Naboo. The Child would have been nine at this point. We're just going to throw it out there... Baby Yaddle, anyone?

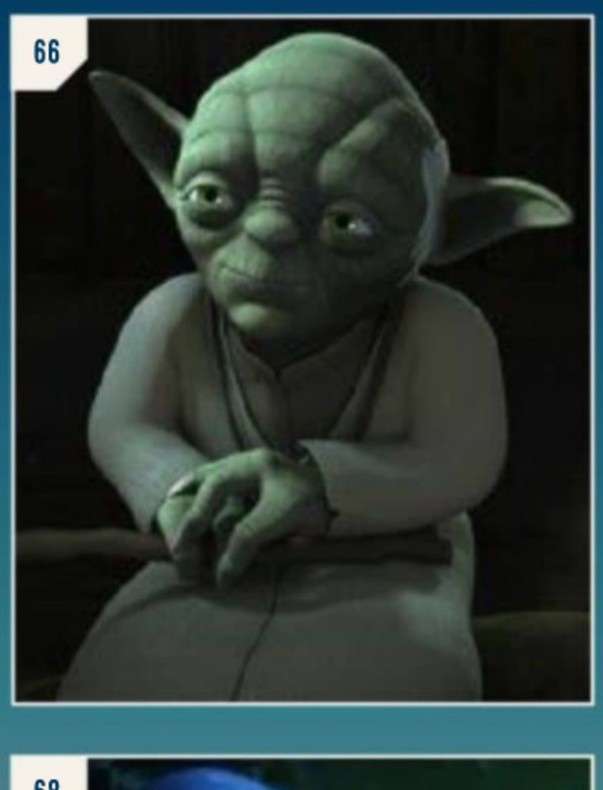
66 It's worth asking ourselves whether Master Yoda, who was able to reach out across the galaxy to the Force-sensitive Ezra Bridger in *Rebels* episodes *Path of the Jedi* and *Shroud of Darkness*, knew of The Child's existence?

67 Did we mention that The Child was born the same year as Anakin Skywalker? Could this curiously coincidental detail mean something larger for the lore?

68 While Anakin died five years prior to when *The Mandalorian* is set (it's easy to forget that he was only 44 at the end of *Return of the Jedi*), his son Luke Skywalker is very much active. With Din Djarin on the search for enemy sorcerers-- sorry, Jedi, and Luke currently being the *last* Jedi in the galaxy, their paths could very conceivably cross. *The Rise of Skywalker* proved that ILM were very capable of recreating a realistic era-appropriate Mark Hamill.























69 Elsewhere, a young Ben Solo is currently 4-years old...

70 ...while The First Order, his future army, has already begun to amass in secret.

71 A crossover with The First Order isn't just conjecture, it's already been hinted at by show producer Dave Filoni, providing a perfect opportunity to finally explain exactly why Palpatine thought he'd need to grow several pre-wrinkled Snokes in test-tubes to lead it. We need to know!

72 *When* The First Order will feature in *The Mandalorian* isn't clear yet, but there's plenty about Season 2 we do know for sure. Last seen setting off on a mission to find the missing Ezra Bridger in the *Rebels*' finale, the immensely popular former-Jedi turned Rebellion intelligence operative Ahsoka Tano will finally be making her live-action debut.

73 And Lady Tano isn't the only *Clone Wars* veteran preparing to make the jump from pixels to in-person, with *Battlestar Galactica*'s Katee Sackhoff reprising her role as Mandalorian Bo-Katan Kryze.

74 Bo-Katan was the last known rightful wielder of the Darksaber, having been anointed as leader of Mandalore during the events of *Rebels*.

75 Of course, with the villainous Moff Gideon now in possession of the Darksaber, expect the story of how he acquired the ancient blade to be explored, incorporating the Empire's siege of Mandalore and, specifically, 'The Night of a Thousand Tears'.

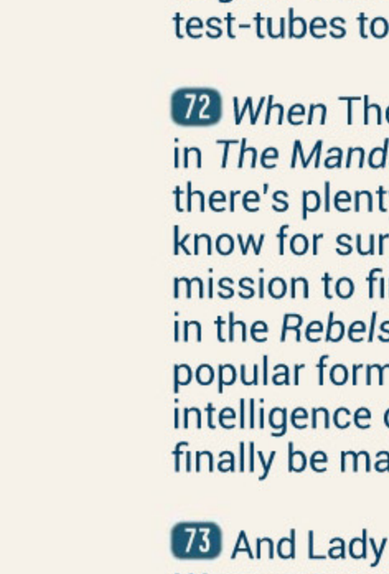
76 Though Season 2 will no doubt be shedding a little more light on this brutal event, Gideon actor Giancarlo Esposito recently teased that they'll be "*laying the groundwork*" to really explore the answers in greater detail come Season 3 and 4.

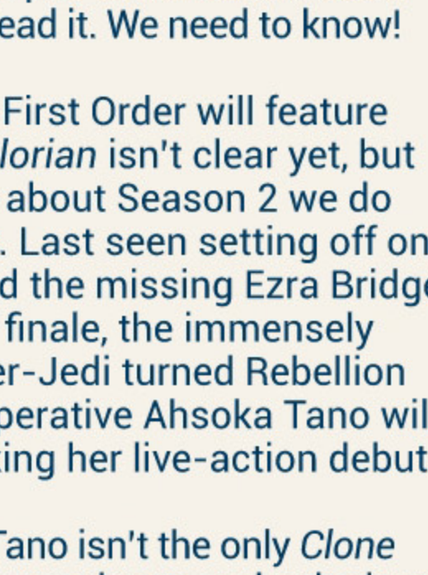
77 The question as to whether or not Boba Fett kicked the bucket when he took a humiliating tumble into the Great Pit of Carkoon will be dealt with much sooner, with his armour (at the very least) confirmed to appear when we make another stop-off on Tatooine during Season 2.

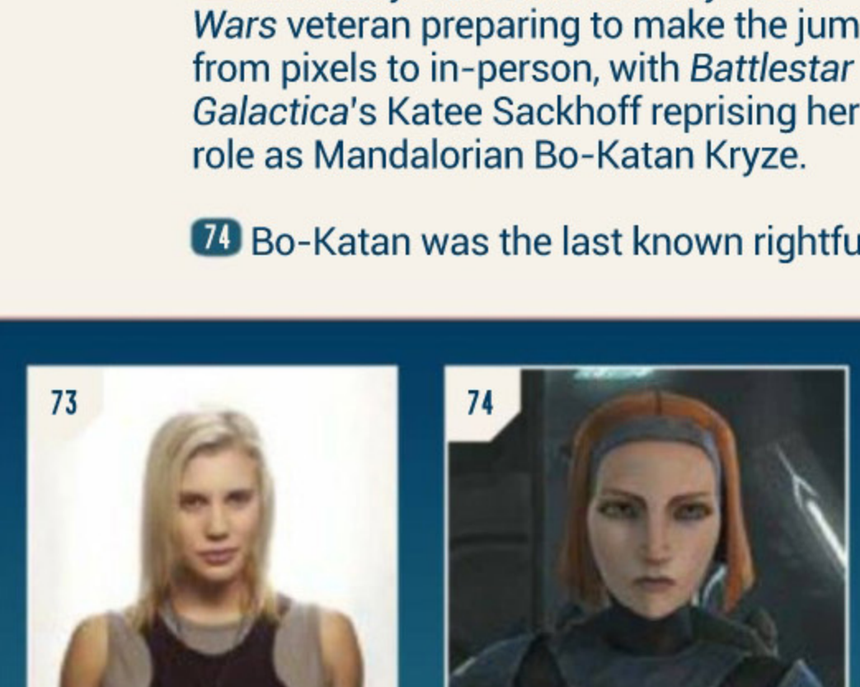
78 But with Jango Fett actor Temuera Morrison now a member of the cast, we'll wager a sizeable wedge of galactic credits that we will see an adult Boba in the mix, with or without his Mandalorian duds.

79 It's highly likely Morrison will also be playing a retired clone trooper or two. As we established earlier, the show certainly thrives on getting bang for its buck!

80 The Fett mystery deepens with the addition of *Justified*'s Timothy Olyphant to the team. He's been long rumoured to be playing Cobb Vanth, a character introduced in Chuck Wendig's 2015 novel *Aftermath*. In that book, Vanth is

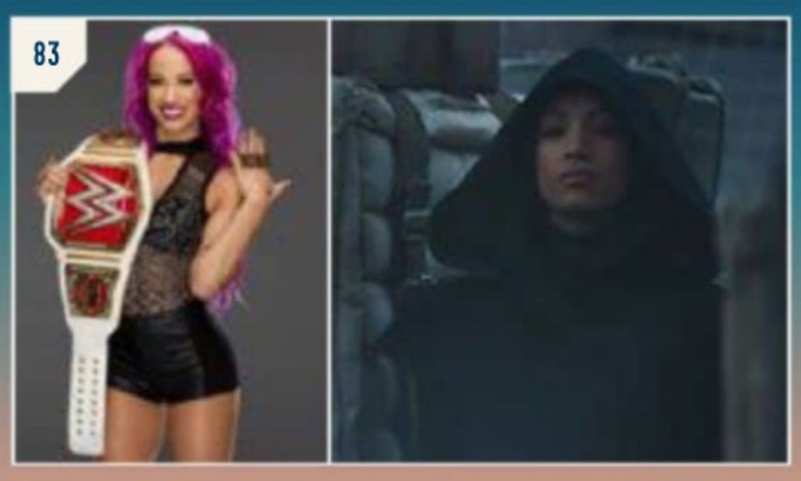


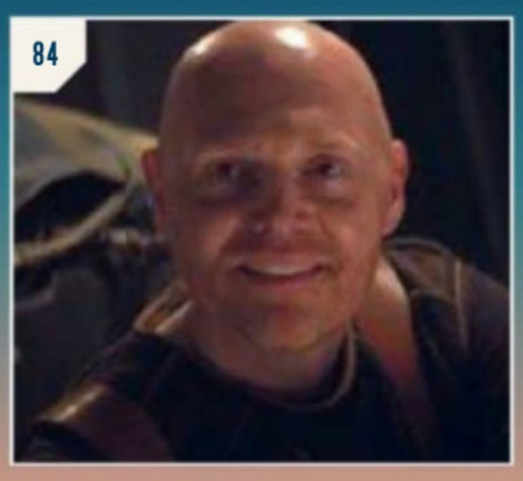














a Tatooine sheriff who adopted the Fett armour after purchasing it from Jawas.

81 Wondering who that shadowy, spur-jangling mystery person was investigating the fallen Fennec Shand in the final moment of the Tatooine-set *Chapter 5*? Expect either entry 78 or 80 to provide the answer!

82 On the other hand, we don't have any answers as to who *The Terminator* and *Aliens* star Michael Biehn will playing at the time of writing, but expect the James Cameron favourite to be in the mix in Season 2.

83 As will Sasha Banks, who graduates from beating the crap out of people in the WWE to beating the crap out of people in the GFFA.

84 Also out of their comfort zone is sardonic stand-up comedian Bill Burr, who famously dislikes *Star Wars* and its fandom, but will be back as Mayfield. At the request of Favreau, Burr brought that incredulousness to the role, powering the former Imperial sharpshooter-turned-mercenary with a palpable antagonism. We're not even certain whether Burr's mock-dropping of The Child or that vicious Gungan diss were even in the script!

85 During the events of *The Mandalorian*, our favourite Gungan Jar-Jar Binks is currently a poor street clown performing for the children of Theed, tortured by his involvement in the Empire's creation. Given Jon Favreau's soft spot for embracing the more ostracised aspects of *Star Wars* lore (see 23, 24, 26, and 27), coupled with the latter episode's seeding, it's a distinct possibility that wesa not seen the last of the generationally divisive character.



86 Since his breakthrough in 1996 with the critically acclaimed indie picture *Swingers*, writer/director/producer/actor/chef Jon Favreau has been instrumental in several seismic pop-culture mainstays on his road to creating this exciting new chapter in *Star Wars*, including a fondly remembered role in *Friends* as Monica's wannabe cage-fighter boyfriend Pete Becker. Oh yeah, and he also helped create the Marvel Cinematic Universe. We hear those 23 films are quite popular too.

87 Of the eight episodes in *The Mandalorian*'s sophomore season, Favreau has penned six, with Dave Filoni and Rick Famuyiwa each handling one of the remaining two.

88 Once again on directorial duties this year are Favreau, Filoni, Famuyiwa, and Bryce Dallas Howard...

89 ...with Robert Rodriguez and Peyton Reed joining them. While Rodriguez needs no introduction, Peyton Reed is best known to genre fans for helming two MCU entries so far, *Ant-Man* and its sequel *Ant-Man and the Wasp*. His work on *The Mandalorian* sees him taking time out of developing the third in the trilogy.

90 While neither Taika Waititi or Deborah Chow are returning for Season 2, both have excellent reasons for their absence, with the former currently working on pre-production for *Thor: Love and Thunder* and an untitled future *Star Wars* theatrical release, and the latter prepping for a March 2021 start date on the Obi-Wan Kenobi miniseries. Chow will direct every episode of that show...

91 ...which will utilise many assets already developed for *The Mandalorian*, such as the Tatooine landscapes and Mos Eisley cantina set.











92 When Dave Filoni directed his Season 2 episode, George Lucas was on set and on hand to assist. Since employing him to lead the development of *The Clone Wars* series in 2005 and working closely with him over the subsequent years, Lucas would come to consider Filoni as "*a son*" (this came from Bryce Dallas Howard herself, who is a long-time family friend of the filmmaker). This blessing, coupled with his unparalleled understanding of *Star Wars* lore and Lucas' intentions behind it, often sees him being heralded as a frontman for the franchise going forward. It remains to be seen whether the super-talented but equally self-effacing Filoni would even want the responsibility, but expect him to continue to play a pivotal role in the future of live-action *Star Wars* at the very least.

93 Rounding out the directors this season is none other than Carl Weathers, who will be taking a break from his role as Greef Karga to step behind the camera and call the shots on an episode also.

94 Given Weathers' cinematic legacy with the *Rocky* movies, where he famously portrayed Apollo Creed, it would be apt if his episode featured, off the top of our heads, two Gamorreans duking it out for the delight of sports fans in some sort of space boxing ring...

95 Those mean, green, bacon-adjacent brutes were last featured prominently in *Return of the Jed* working as guards for Jabba's Palace, but they're not the only species set to make a comeback in Season 2. Expect to see more of Admiral Ackbar's race, the Mon Calamari, as Clan Mudhorn's travels take them to the ocean planet of Mon Cala...

96 ...also home to the Quarren (we just called these guys Squid Head back in 1983), one of which we saw Mando slice in two during Season 1's premiere.

97 Another stop on the journey to reunite The Child with his race looks very much to be Ilam, a snow-covered planet rich in the Force (its caves served as a pilgrimage for Padawans before the dark times... before the Empire), and has been seen on screen in *The Clone Wars* and recent video game title *Jedi: Fallen Order*. In just twenty-five years' time from the moment our heroes visit Ilum, the planet will have already been converted into Starkiller Base, and will cruelly harness its kyber core to fire upon the Hosnian system, finally bringing a ruthless end to the New Republic.

98 Some atrocities even Din Djarin and The Child will be unable to prevent during their lifetime, but we do know that there's a very strong possibility that one or both will assist in ultimately ending the tyranny of Darth Sidious once and for all. Look closely during the final battle on Exegol in *The Rise of Skywalker* and you'll see the Razor Crest has also answered the call to arms, and is ready to fight The Final Order.



99 Answering a call to arms of another kind were the crew behind *The Mandalorian* themselves. After wrapping principal photography just a few days before 2020's catastrophic events shut down productions across the world, Team Mando developed new methods of continuing the intensive post-production processes required of them to stay on target, hit their original release date, and deliver a successor to the franchise's most fondly received instalment in forty years.

100 As post-production on Season 2 marched on, pre-production on Season 3 had already begun, with the Design Department led by Lucasfilm Executive Creative Director Doug Chiang starting work as early as April...

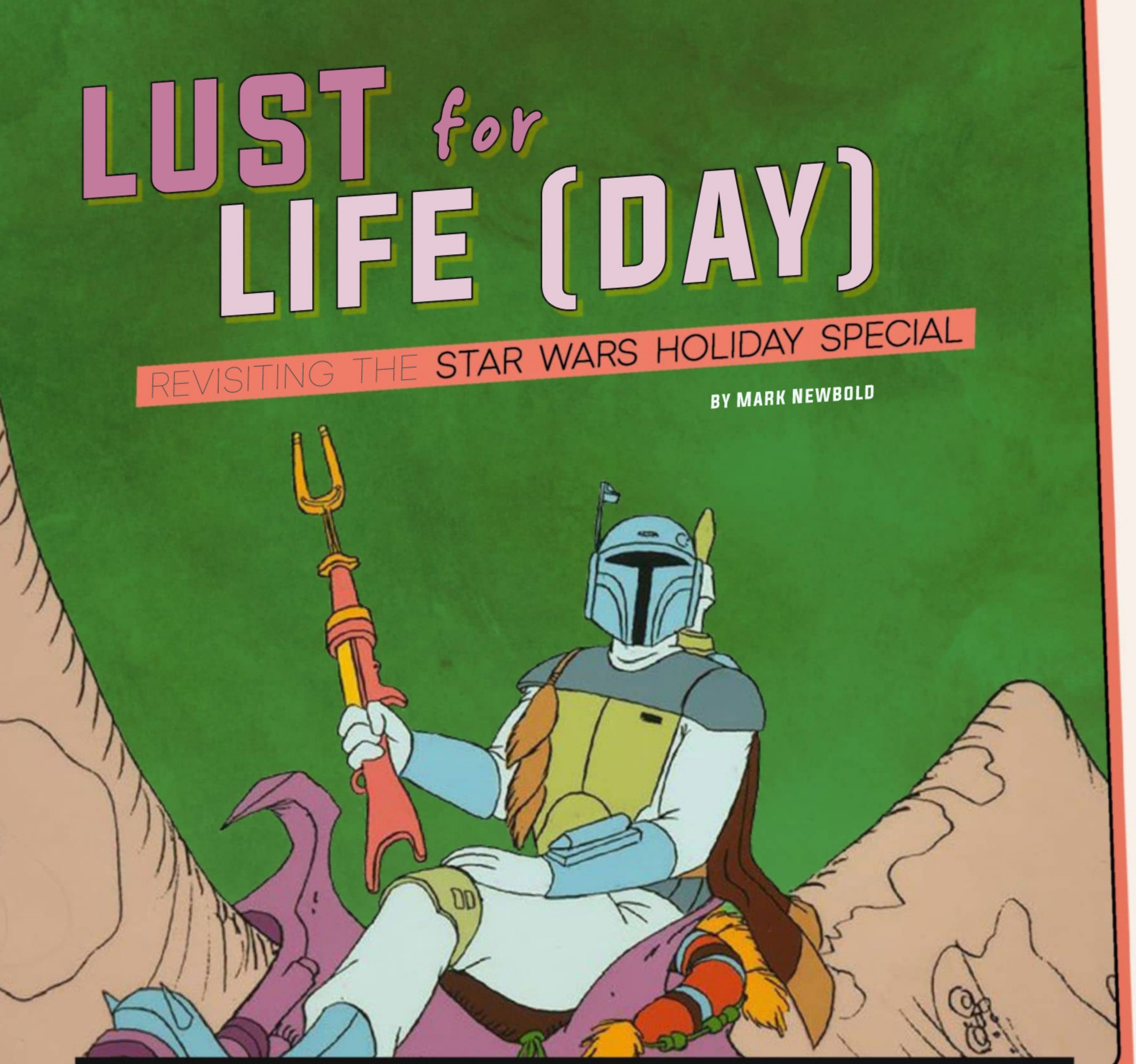
101 ...but not to be outdone, Jon Favreau, clearly uninterested in ever sleeping, had reportedly already been working on the Season 3 scripts "*for a while*". By this point, we're convinced he's more machine than man!

Season 2 of THE MANDALORIAN will air weekly on Disney+ from October 30th.

LUST *for* LIFE (DAY)

REVISITING THE STAR WARS HOLIDAY SPECIAL

BY MARK NEWBOLD



Inspired by THE MANDALORIAN's welcome return to our screens, we bravely trace its origins back to November 17th, 1978, the darkest day in STAR WARS history...

In the early years of the second decade of the 21st century, it seems that every day brings another slew of *Star Wars* content. In the last five years, Lucasfilm and Disney have brought us the sequel trilogy and the *Star Wars Story* standalone films, while the animated worlds of *The Clone Wars* and *Star Wars Rebels* are soon to be joined by the forthcoming series *The Bad Batch*. There's also kids animated shorts *Galaxy of Adventures* and *Forces of Destiny* (as well as the numerous LEGO shorts, but more on that later), plus the award-winning live-action series *The Mandalorian*, with both the Kenobi and Cassian Andor shows in pre-production and the next big screen adventure coming Christmas 2023.

There are Del Rey and Disney novels, Marvel and IDW comics, LEGO, Funko, Hasbro, Mattel, and a plethora of other toy and collectible manufacturers, the official magazine *Star Wars Insider* and StarWars.com, the enormous Star Wars Celebration convention, marketing campaigns like Force Friday, Wookiee Wednesday, Go Rogue, and now Mando Mondays... there really is no shortage of the galaxy far, far away!

The last six years – since the launch of *Star Wars Rebels* in 2014 – has seen more *Star Wars* content released than at any other time in the franchise's long and storied history, so to imagine what the anticipation for the *Star Wars Holiday Special* was like you'd have to step back to 8pm on Friday November 17th, 1978 – the timeslot usually reserved for *Wonder Woman* and *The Incredible Hulk* – when its one and only screening would take place on CBS.

Imagine, a little under four years before *Star Wars* (and it was still called *Star Wars* then, the title change to *A New Hope* was still three years away, added for the 1981 re-release) came to video, LaserDisc, and television, before the swathe of impersonators rode in on the starlight of the 1977 film's success in the form of the big screen debut of *Star Trek*, *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*, Disney's *The Black Hole*, James Bond

in *Moonraker* and numerous other projects (*Battlestar Galactica* had recently debuted on September 17th 1978), here was *Star Wars* – 'actual' *Star Wars* – with the cast of the highest grossing film ever made on network television for a dazzling new adventure! What could possibly go wrong?

First, some perspective...

1978, and US television in particular, was a very different time indeed. Today, we can enjoy any one of a hundred channels available on our TV, dive into YouTube and social media for countless hours of content to say nothing of the ever-proliferating streaming options we now have. In '78, the UK had *three* terrestrial channels, while the States had four networks (CBS, NBS, ABC, and PBS). 1978 saw the debut of *Dallas*, *The Incredible Hulk*, and *Taxi*, and the end of *The Bionic Man*, *Columbo*, and *Yogi's Space Race* (check that one out for thirteen, 90-minute episodes of shameless *Star Wars* homagery!). The air was still littered with *Happy Days* shows (the classic sitcom itself, almost halfway through a decade-long run, along with spin-offs *Laverne & Shirley* and the newly-arrived *Mork & Mindy*), and '60s hold-ons (*The Carole Burnett Show*, *Hawaii Five-O*). *Saturday Night Live* was still a phenomenon, with the Blues Brothers debuting on its April 22nd episode, and the era of the mega miniseries was just taking off (the ground-breaking *Roots* starring LeVar Burton and the multiple Emmy and Golden Globe-winning *Holocaust* starring Meryl Streep and James Woods being two notable highlights of the year). With *Star Wars* dominating the box office, and still riding high over a year after its release in those nostalgia-laden, pre-multiplex, queue-round-the-block days, the *Holiday Special* was certain to be a smash hit!

The idea for a network special came from CBS, who brought their idea to Lucasfilm's head of publicity, the late Charles Lippincott. With the film still bringing in money and the cast regulars on chat shows in the States and beyond, the idea was taken to George Lucas and Gary Kurtz who were receptive. However – and crucially – Lucas was moving Lucasfilm's headquarters to their new base in North Hollywood, and Kurtz was busy with Chapter II, aka *The Empire Strikes Back*. J.W. Rinzler's essential *The Making of Star Wars* touched upon this era, as Lucasfilm hit a growth spurt after the colossal success of *Star Wars*, and Kurtz remembered the situation regarding the *Holiday Special* - *"It did start out to be a lot better. We had half a dozen meetings with the TV company that was making it. In the end, because of work on promoting Star Wars and working on the next film, we realised we had no time. So we just left it to them and just had the occasional*

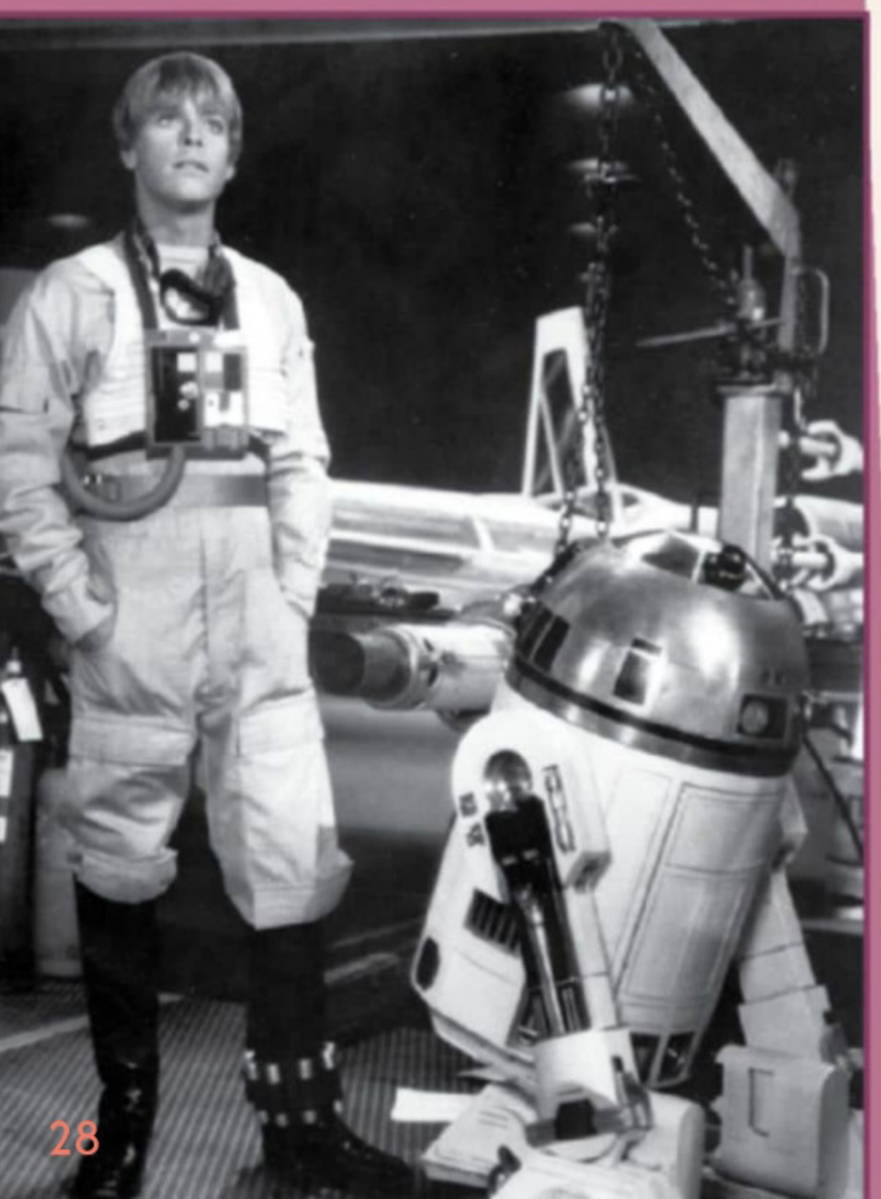












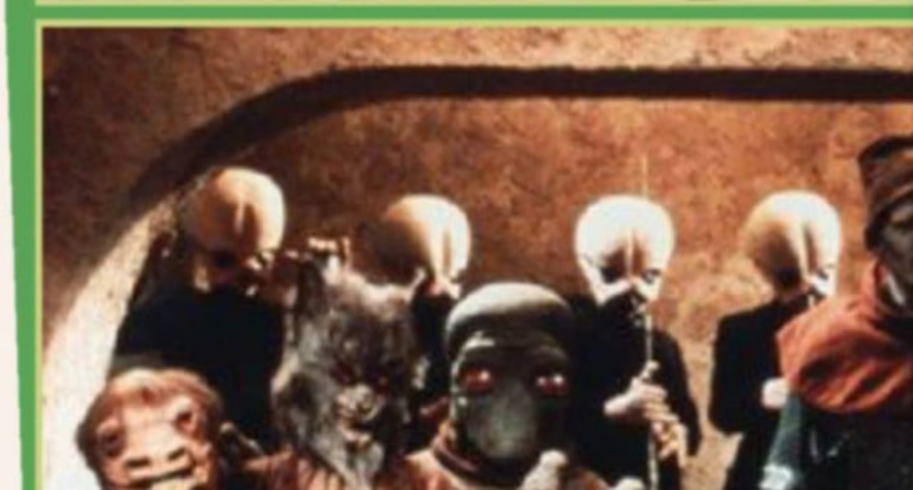
meetings with them, provided them with access to props and the actors, and that was it."

As he had long wished to do on the big screen, Lucas wanted the story to centre around the Wookiees, specifically the family of Chewbacca on Kashyyyk, something budget and technology had made almost impossible (he would remedy that in some measure with the Ewoks five years later in *Return of the Jedi* and two TV movies on ABC, *Caravan of Courage* and *The Battle for Endor*). A tricky task, Stan Winston was brought in to design and create the Wookiee family, while Lucas' USC classmate David Acomba came on to direct, leaving after filming the cantina and Jefferson Starship sequences to be replaced by Steve Binder, a musical director who oversaw the legendary Elvis Presley's 1968 *Comeback Special* along with a slew of other musical shows.

The plot was simple: get Chewbacca past Imperial blockades back to Kashyyyk for the Wookiee celebration called Life Day. To achieve that, CBS utilised stock visual effects footage, which included the use of archival scenes of Dave Prowse as Darth Vader and Alec Guinness as Ben Kenobi, weaved in with new footage of their lead cast – a post-car accident Mark Hamill, almost killed after a high speed smash required extensive plastic surgery to save his face, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, Anthony Daniels, and Peter Mayhew – and a remote-control R2-D2. With no credit in the original film, James Earl Jones finally got the recognition his iconic vocal performance as Vader deserved, while original music was composed by Ken and Mitzie Welch, with Ian Fraser adapting John Williams' Oscar-winning themes from *Star Wars.* (1978 had also seen *Star Wars* pick up six Oscars and a special achievement award for Ben Burtt at the 50th Academy Awards ceremony.)

The scores of Welch and Williams wasn't the only music to be heard in the show. As befits a Holiday Special (and remember, this is a year after the Fonz jumped the shark in 1977, but *before* the phrase was coined in the '90s), the action was peppered with contemporary musical guests. Diahann Carroll sung the sensual *This Minute Now*, a song that Chewie's dad Itchy appeared to be enjoying a bit too much, while Jefferson Starship performed *Light the Sky on Fire*. Comedian Harvey Korman provided music and laughs as the four-armed chef Gormaanda and the malfunctioning Amorphian android Dromboid, while Art Carney was trader Saun Dann, who was quick to aid his Wookiee friends. All well and very '70s, but while we can't forget







Carrie Fisher's unique rendition of the Life Day song, perhaps the most memorable performance was given by the legendary *Golden Girl* Bea Arthur as Ackmena, the owner of the Mos Eisley Cantina who sang *Good Night, But Not Goodbye* to the tune of the Figrin D'an and the Modal Nodes classic *Mad About Me* (aka the Cantina song), with the band backing her up. If there's a better last orders song than this, we've yet to hear it.

Given all the cheese and chintz on show in this two-hour, never-to-be-repeated spectacular (which was broadcast that one time on CBS in the States, CTV in Canada, TVNZ in New Zealand, and Seven in Australia), there is a segment of the *Holiday Special* that is quite rightly regarded as a highlight, and a taste of things to come in more ways than one. The ten-minute long animated segment *The Story of the Faithful Wookiee*, written by Lucas, drawn and designed at his





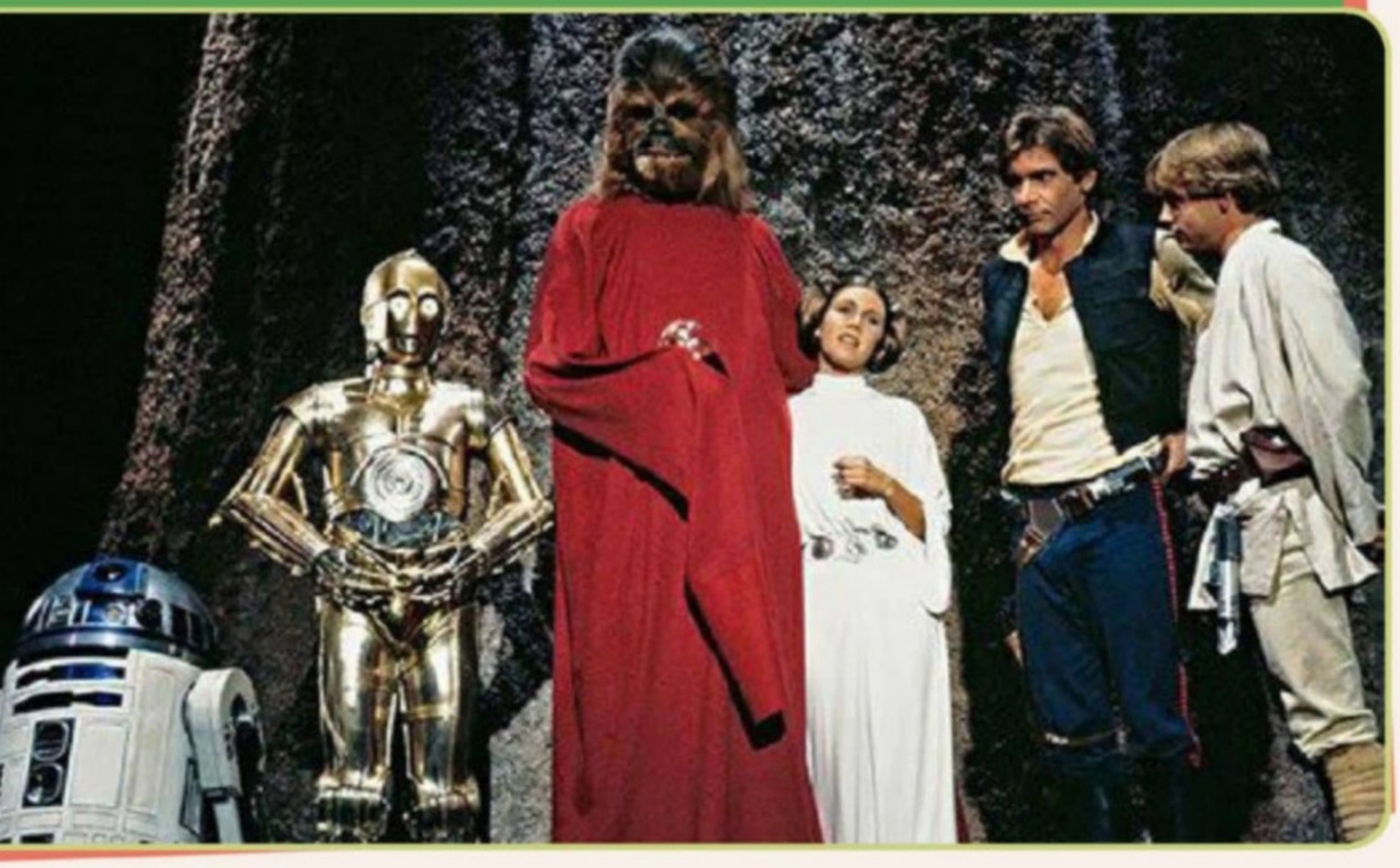


request in the style of French artist Moebius, and produced over six summer weeks by Canadian animation house Nelvana, saw the first appearance of a soon-to-be legendary Star Wars villain – Boba Fett. With the main cast voicing their own characters, this dangerous new Mandalorian was voiced by Don Francks, who would go on to perform Fett seven years later in the 1985 animated *Droids* series. Basing their Fett on the unpainted Lucasfilm costume, which at that point was still being prepared for *The Empire Strikes Back*, the weathered look of the animated Fett would go on to inform the final outfit in the film, and the simplified colour scheme would return for his appearance in *Droids* years later. That wasn't the only return the animated Fett would make. Over the following 42 years, a Firespray full of merchandise has been produced based on the *Holiday Special* Fett. Hot Toys released a *Holiday Special* version of Fett, as have Gentle Giant who produced a stunning statue in vivid packaging. StarWarsShop produced a series of cards available only by ordering through the site, while Star Wars Celebration Chicago offered a *Holiday Special* lunch box, and the Boba Fett Fan Club went one further, making available a series of T-shirts showing Fett in his Empire, Jedi, original white, McQuarrie concept, and *Holiday Special* colours.

Of most relevance is Fett's weapon, seen here in his hands for the first time but now famous for its live-action presence in the Disney+ series *The Mandalorian*. Then described as a tuning fork and used to control the Panna Dragon that Fett was riding, the Amban phase-pulse blaster became famous in the first season of *The Mandalorian*, a devastating weapon that lead character Din Djarin used to pick off Jawas after they scavenged his ship the Razor Crest. Also noteworthy is Fett's Sacros K-11 blaster, which bears a striking resemblance to Jango Fett's WESTAR-34 blaster pistols used in *Attack of the Clones*, showing clearly that while the *Holiday Special* may have been voted number one on *The 100 Dumbest Events in Television History*, there are elements that are cherished to this day.

So, about those reactions...

David Hofstede, the author of the aforementioned *What Were They Thinking?: The 100 Dumbest Events in Television History*, ranked the holiday special at number one, calling it "*the worst two hours of television ever*", while Fox News anchor Shepard Smith called it a "*'70s train wreck, combining the worst of Star Wars with the utter worst of variety television.*" Perhaps the most stinging review was posted by Nathan Rabin of The A.V. Club who wrote, "*I'm not convinced the special wasn't ultimately written and directed by a sentient bag of cocaine*", and even Rotten Tomatoes only



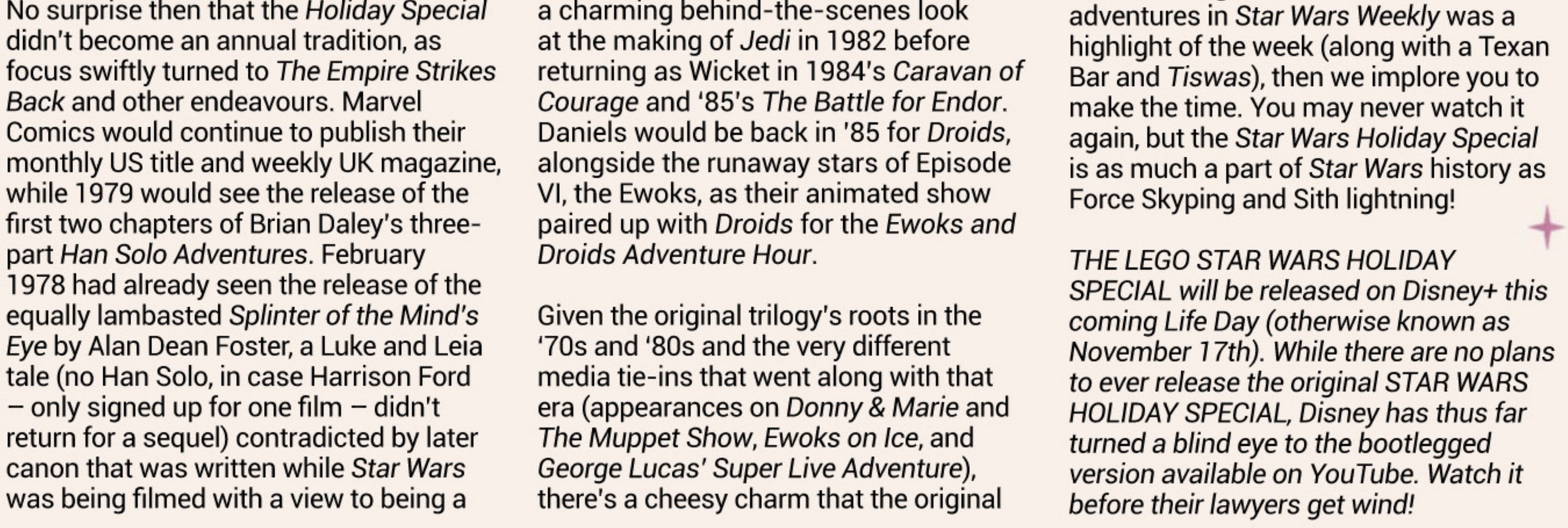
gave it a 27% approval rating. Universally slated, there was only that one screening and the show has never been released in any official format, although the '80s and '90s saw tape traders spend inordinate amounts of money to secure their copies of this illusive chapter of the *Star Wars* story. As George Lucas famously said, if he could have hunted down and smashed every copy to wipe it from existence, he would have.

No surprise then that the *Holiday Special* didn't become an annual tradition, as focus swiftly turned to *The Empire Strikes Back* and other endeavours. Marvel Comics would continue to publish their monthly US title and weekly UK magazine, while 1979 would see the release of the first two chapters of Brian Daley's three-part *Han Solo Adventures*. February 1978 had already seen the release of the equally lambasted *Splinter of the Mind's Eye* by Alan Dean Foster, a Luke and Leia tale (no Han Solo, in case Harrison Ford – only signed up for one film – didn't return for a sequel) contradicted by later canon that was written while *Star Wars* was being filmed with a view to being a possible TV project should the original film fall short at the box office. November 1980 saw R2-D2 and C-3PO return on the oddly charming *Christmas in the Stars* album – no connection to the *Holiday Special* – and by then, after the monster success of *Empire* and with *Star Wars* cementing its place in movie history as the road to *Revenge of the Jedi* began, they could do no wrong. No more Holiday Specials, but Warwick Davis and David Tomblin would shoot *Return of the Ewok*, a charming behind-the-scenes look at the making of *Jedi* in 1982 before returning as Wicket in 1984's *Caravan of Courage* and '85's *The Battle for Endor*. Daniels would be back in '85 for *Droids*, alongside the runaway stars of Episode VI, the Ewoks, as their animated show paired up with *Droids* for the *Ewoks and Droids Adventure Hour*.

Given the original trilogy's roots in the '70s and '80s and the very different media tie-ins that went along with that era (appearances on *Donny & Marie* and *The Muppet Show*, *Ewoks on Ice*, and *George Lucas' Super Live Adventure*), there's a cheesy charm that the original trilogy possesses that the more sombre prequels and largely directionless sequels don't, hence the very welcome announcement of *The LEGO Star Wars Holiday Special*, which arrives on Disney+ on November 17th, 42 years to the day after its original broadcast. Taking place after the events of *The Rise of Skywalker*, the show will see Rey and BB-8 strike out to learn more about the Force as her friends aboard the Millennium Falcon prepare for Life Day. As a wise Sith once said, *all too easy* – Rey is thrown into an adventure through time in a Jedi temple, meeting characters from across the timeline, and there's already merchandise tied into the episode with this year's LEGO Advent Calendar featuring moments from the show.

So, 42 years after it first came to our galaxy, why should you seek out and watch the *Star Wars Holiday Special*? Surely it's a terrible show "*ultimately written and directed by a sentient bag of cocaine*" and not worthy of the two hours it would take to watch it? Perhaps, if the cynic in you is in control, but if you want a flavour of what it was like to be a *Star Wars* fan in 1978, when pretty much everything we knew about *Star Wars* was contained in that original film, as those much-loved Palitoy figures were just starting to hit the shops and the thrill of slapping down your 10p on a Wednesday to tear through our heroes' latest adventures in *Star Wars Weekly* was a highlight of the week (along with a Texan Bar and *Tiswas*), then we implore you to make the time. You may never watch it again, but the *Star Wars Holiday Special* is as much a part of *Star Wars* history as Force Skyping and Sith lightning!

THE LEGO STAR WARS HOLIDAY SPECIAL will be released on Disney+ this coming Life Day (otherwise known as November 17th). While there are no plans to ever release the original STAR WARS HOLIDAY SPECIAL, Disney has thus far turned a blind eye to the bootlegged version available on YouTube. Watch it before their lawyers get wind!



THE LEGO STAR WARS HOLIDAY SPECIAL

GO BEYOND The Column



podcast

available now on iTunes

Wanda -what?

By Laura Griffiths



Ahead of WandaVision coming to Disney+, we take a look at the on-again, off-again romance between Scarlet Witch and the Vision...

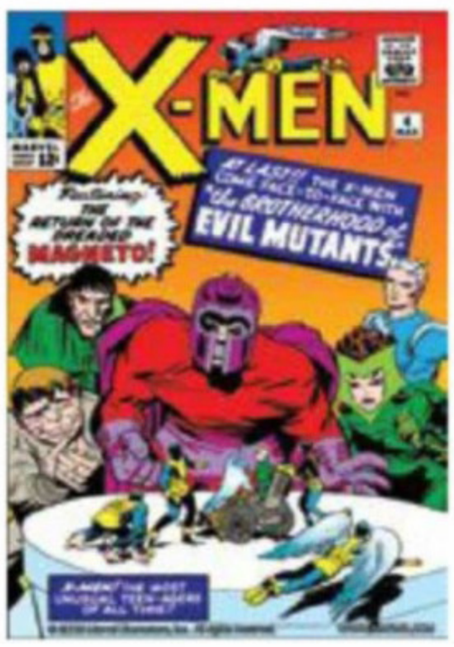
USUALLY at this time of year, we're lavished with big reveals from our favourite franchises but thanks to a pandemic and the subsequent rescheduling of theatrical releases, details and concrete launch dates have been pretty thin. One spin-off we've only had a very brief look at is the imminent ***WandaVision*** series starring Avengers alumni Elizabeth Olsen and Paul Bettany. So, while we decode and speculate the small teases we've seen so far on this marriage between mutant and synthetic, we're taking a look at this unlikely duo and their often-weird, sometimes sad history in Marvel Comics.

Wanda-who?

The characters and their relationship on paper are very different to that which we've seen so far on screen. For starters, Wanda hasn't actually been referred to as the red-caped Scarlet Witch yet following her introduction to the MCU with twin brother Quicksilver in ***Avengers: Age of Ultron***. Created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, Scarlet Witch aka Wanda Maximoff first appeared in 1964 in ***Uncanny X-Men*** #4, and while in film she's become a key member of the Avengers troupe and therefore, one of the good guys, in the comics, it wasn't always that way.

Wanda is a mutant who can tap into the cosmic powers of the universe. She possesses magic abilities, can alter reality and manipulate probabilities to use against her foes. Both Wanda and Quicksilver entered the series as members of the Brotherhood of Mutants under the wing of Magneto, who, depending on who you ask, is revealed to be their father - stay with us, thanks to a lot of retcons, their lineage gets complicated.

Their mother Magda is said to have fled from Magneto to Wundagore Mountain where she gave birth with the help of an anthropomorphic cow named Bova -





"Her mother gave birth with the help of an anthropomorphic cow named Bova."

comics, ladies and gentlemen. Leaving nothing but a note, Magda disappears and the new-borns are left in the care of the midwife cow who calls on her boss, the High Evolutionary, to help. The twins are placed with a Roma gypsy couple Django and Marya Maximoff and after some pretty traumatic events that see the accidental slaying of their adopted mother, they are forced to leave their home town. Wandering through Europe, Wanda is spotted using her powers and chased by an angry mob but Magneto saves and recruits them for his mutant supergroup to go up against the X-Men. Wanda, unaware of the paternal connection, obliges, feeling she owes Magneto a debt for their rescue. Time passes and Wanda and Quicksilver's motives don't exactly sit well with that of the Brotherhood, so the reluctant villains ask the Avengers - in a handwritten letter, no less - if they can join their squad.

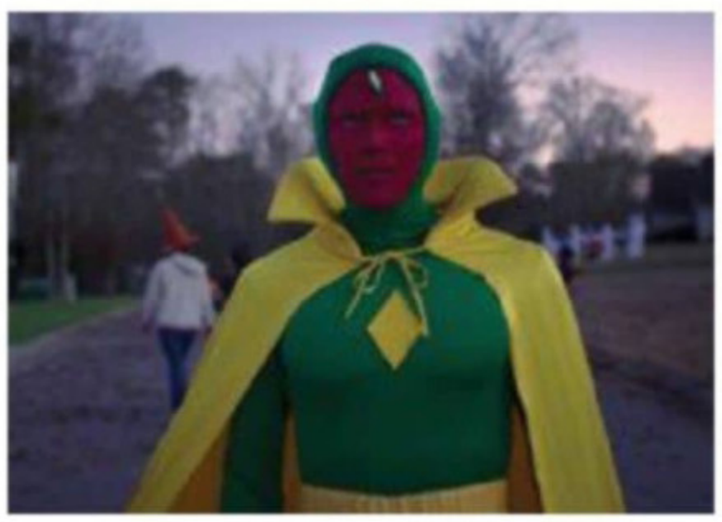
Synthetics in the Suburbs

Wanda had already joined the Avengers crew (and left and joined again) when Vision made his debut as the super powerful synthezoid with feelings in ***Avengers*** #57. Created by Hank Pym's rebellious Ultron by combining the brain scan of Wonder Man with











the android body of the Human Torch, Vision is manipulated to be a villain in a bid to kill The Avengers, earning his moniker when the Wasp labels him an "unearthly, inhuman Vision". The red, solar power-absorbing android ends up turning against Ultron and trying out for the Avengers himself. It's here where Wanda and Vision start their romance...

In 1975, Wanda and Vision got married in ***Giant-Size Avengers*** #4, tying the knot in a joint ceremony with Mantis and Swordsman (well, an alien in the form of his body at least but one storied union at a time, please). They briefly retired to seek out a normal existence in the suburbs of New Jersey, documented in two limited series featuring four and 12 issues, both titled ***Vision and the Scarlet Witch***. But it's not the quiet wedded bliss they'd hoped for. Their suburban life leads to conflicts, not least with their new neighbours who protest to having their 'kind' living on their doorstep. In a commentary on cultural prejudices at the time, ***The Avengers*** #113 sees an image of Vision and Wanda kissing, aggravating a group of bigoted extremists who attempt to attack Stark Industries and destroy the Vision.

Inside the relationship, there are more struggles, heightened when the couple discover they can't have children. However, with the assistance of a Dr Stephen Strange, Wanda is able to leverage her powers to make herself pregnant and gives birth to twins Thomas and William. Wanda and Vision decide to rejoin the Avengers on the West Coast, where Vision winds up being kidnapped by rogue government agents and dismantled, deleting his memories in the process. He gets put back together by Pym but after a jealous Wonder Man refuses to donate his brainwaves again, is left a white, cold, emotionless shell of the being he once was. Tragedy struck again when their twins were zapped out of existence by the Master Pandemonium. It's later revealed that Wanda's magic miracles were, in fact, fragments of the demon Mephisto who had been using Pandemonium to regain the lost shards of his soul. In a twist of fate many years later, the twins resurface in the form of Teen Avengers Wiccan and Speed in ***Avengers: The Children's Crusade***.

A distraught Wanda has her memories of the children blocked by her old mentor Agatha Harkness, she and Vision part ways and things start to spiral. In ***Avengers Disassembled***, when some of those painful memories come back, Wanda has a mental breakdown and attacks the Avengers, killing Ant-Man, Hawkeye, and the Vision before Dr Strange halts her tirade with a trance. These traumatic events cause Wanda to dream up a new ***House of M*** reality where mutants are the majority. But, things are no better in this universe and Wanda ends up nearly killing off the entire mutant population with the immortal words "No more mutants" before going into hiding in Wundergore.

Both characters have continued to appear throughout the comics with and without each other at their side. In ***The Children's Crusade***, Scarlet Witch is linked with Doctor Doom before taking him down, and meeting with her supposed reincarnated young superhero son. In a more recent solo series, Vision even dreamt up a wholly different life in suburbia by building an entirely synthetic family complete with pet dog. But like all his attempts for normalcy, the dream was short-lived as his wife and son were dismantled for harming humans, leaving just his daughter Viv. Though, like father like daughter, Viv did go on to become a hero herself by joining the teen group, the Champions.



What does this all mean for WandaVision?
There are many rebirths, time jumps and team-ups to contend with in Wanda and Vision's complex histories, and given their altered backstory in the MCU, we're still in the dark about how the pieces will fit together in ***WandaVision***. Details on the series have been limited and save for the footage that debuted recently, we've heard very little about what the series might actually entail.

The footage shows Wanda in what looks to be a number of alternate realities, taking on the guise of sitcoms throughout the decades. The first promotional poster centred on a 1950s style with Wanda and Vision sat holding hands in a suburban living room with a shadow looming in the background appearing to depict both characters in their superhero attire. We even catch a glimpse of Wanda in a sort of Halloween costume take on the classic red Scarlet Witch suit and crown.

The show, written by ***Captain Marvel*** and ***Black Widow*** co-writer Jac Schaeffer, will be set after the events of ***Avengers: Endgame*** and tie into the MCU going forward. How Vision gets brought back to life in his 1980s jeans and plaid shirt finery is yet to be explained seeing as he suffered a definitive ***Avengers: Endgame*** death that left his fate unaltered by the events of 'the snap'. But how ***dead*** is any character in a comic book universe, really? And given that Vision is an artificial being, there's a good chance he could be brought back to life somehow without the need for another 'time heist'. They've rebuilt him once before and surely this time one of those geniuses thought to back up his memories on a cloud somewhere?

WANDAVISION is expected to debut on Disney+ this December.









AN EYE FOR AN EYE

by Martin Unsworth

The controversial 1978 film I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE has just been released as part of a 6-disc box set that includes the reboot trilogy, the UK debut of the direct sequel, DÉJÀ VU, and a feature-length documentary GROWING UP WITH I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE. We managed to speak with actors CAMILLE KEATON and JAMIE BERNADETTE as well as the son of the original director, TERRY ZARCHI to find out more about the legendary revenge films...

The inspiration of Meir Zarchi's debut film was a real-life incident. While driving with his daughter, he came across a naked woman running from some woods. She had been raped. Shocked, he took her to the police, who then looked after her. This occurrence gave birth to *Day of the Woman*, a hard-hitting, disturbing, and powerful film that is in no way an easy film to watch. Its initial engagements in the US were in the drive-in market, where it didn't make its budget back. It wasn't until the Jerry Gross Organisation picked it up for distribution in 1980 and forced a retitling to the much more exploitative *I Spit on Your Grave* that it became a cause célèbre, particularly when it hit the burgeoning home video market. The story follows Jennifer Hills (Camille Keaton), a writer, who has taken herself away to a small town to work. During her stay, she is subjected to arguably the worst sexual abuse seen on the screen up to that point. While that is not something to be proud of, it does repel and disturb the audience enough to accept the third act of the movie, in which Jennifer takes her revenge on the men who raped her. It was remade in 2010, and that film spawned two sequels. A direct sequel finally arrived in 2019, with both the original director back behind the camera and Keaton back as Jennifer.

Terry Zarchi is Meir's son and has directed the documentary *Growing Up with I Spit on Your Grave*, a fascinating and revealing account of the making and impact of the first film. It is included in the new box set. He told us how he ended up being in the original movie at age nine: "*I was minding my own business visiting the set in Connecticut, being kept far away from any nudity.*" Terry cheekily adds: "*Which meant practically keeping away from the set - period.*" However, being on screen wasn't something he was happy about at the time, "*I was approached to be in the movie. And I was very scared; I was a shy kid. I kept refusing, and before I knew it, crew members were surrounding me, begging me to be in the film, and I finally agreed after I was offered $10.*" It would be several years later when Terry finally saw the film and got to see what his father was working on, "*I was about 14 or 15 and I have to say I was shocked at what I saw. And as a matter of fact, my father recently reminded me that when I was in my late teens, we had a little argument. I said to my father 'only a sick man would make a movie like I Spit on Your Grave!' That was my way of shooting him in the leg, I guess.*" The younger Zarchi did come to terms with his father's film, though. And he got used to having Camille Keaton around, as Meir and the actor married in 1979, just before the movie began causing a storm on the US circuit. The problem in the US didn't come from the usual moral majority avenue, but rather the famous critics, Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert. The pair reviewed the film on its release in 1980, with Ebert calling it "*A vile bag of garbage*" and they were so outraged that they stood outside cinemas in Chicago telling people not to see it. It was a campaign that worked, with many states refusing to show the film.

The backlash got more prominent when the movie was released on video in the UK (it completely skipped the cinemas here). Camille Keaton recalls: "*When Ebert said what he said about the movie, it just made more people want to go to see it. Meir said, 'don't be upset about it, this is good!'*" It certainly did when it came to the video release. *I Spit on Your Grave* featured heavily in the TV reports on the so-called video nasties. We recall hearing more about the 'graphic and horrific' revenge moments than the genuinely disturbing and upsetting rape sequences. This 'negative' publicity had the expected effect: everybody wanted to see the film.

The brutal sexual attacks are depicted in a way that not one viewer could enjoy them. Terry Zarchi goes further: "*It's a difficult film to judge even to this day, and I think that's what makes it so fascinating. It's a horrible, terrible subject matter, and I don't believe it's a movie to watch for entertainment purposes.*" It certainly isn't fun. It is,

"Only a sick man would make a movie like *I Spit on Your Grave*!"

- Terry Zarchi

however, an essential, well-made work that many feel is pro-feminist. Not that we advocate anyone taking matters into their own hands, but there's a satisfaction in watching Jennifer Hills get her revenge after the ordeal we've seen her go through.

Keaton was in her 30s by the time the role of Jennifer Hills came up. She had previously been working in Italy, making some highly-regarded films such as Riccardo Freda's *Tragic Ceremony* and Massimo Dallamano's *What Have You Done to Solange?* (both 1972). Camille told us that she was delighted with landing the role, despite the subject matter: "*I wanted to do an American movie and thought this is my chance. It's a character that gets to show many different aspects of her personality and so forth. So, I thought it was a good idea to do it*". Although she knew it would be troubling to some: "*It was something I couldn't call my parents up to ask them about because they would be against it.*"

As the film's reputation grew, as did the reluctance of some countries to allow it to be seen; several banned the movie outright while most cut it. In the UK, it remained on the DPP's list of films that could be prosecuted under the obscenity laws until 2001. Even when it was released, it was heavily cut by just over seven minutes. Subsequent releases have been a little less heavy-handed, but even the new version on the box set is missing just under two minutes. The cuts are mainly to lessen the nudity during the rape scenes, but they remain traumatic and gruelling.

Fast-forward forty years, and following the popularity of the remake trilogy, we have a legitimate direct sequel to the 1978 film. "*I'd been asking Meir to make a sequel for many, many years and I gave up on it.*" Camille told us, "*Then finally, one day he called me, and he said, 'we're going to make a sequel'.*" The premise for *I Spit on Your Grave: Déjà Vu* sees Keaton return as Jennifer Hills, this time with her daughter Christy (Jamie Bernadette). The pair go back to the town following the success of Jennifer's book on her ordeal. Once there, they are faced with hostility, as the relatives of the men killed by Jennifer are still harbouring a grudge. We asked Jamie Bernadette if she'd been aware of the original film before taking the role: "*I had watched it maybe a year before I saw the casting notice for the sequel. I couldn't believe they were making a sequel, I thought the original was phenomenal, very real and raw, it just feels like it's really happening. It's not glamorised at all. If people didn't know better, I would think it was like a reality video. That's how real it feels.*" She saw it as a part she had to have. She knew it would be challenging, but it was important to do: "*I think we've come a long way with women nowadays compared to the '70s. I think seeing a powerful woman on screen wasn't taken well. It seems like it was the revenge part that some people were offended by, which is interesting.*"

In the sequel, the rapist's families want vengeance, being good old God-fearing folk, they want 'an eye for an eye'. Christy's ordeal almost happens by accident. It's Jennifer they are after. The antagonists are led by Becky (a wonderfully deranged performance by Maria Olsen), the wife of Johnny in the original. She even wears his signature cap and bandana. She's the alpha of the group and - shockingly - is implicit when Christy is raped. It's not a duplication of the 1978 film, though. "*I had expected there to be more raping and stuff because of the first,*" Jamie told us, "*I thought that Meir went easy on me, to be honest! Rape is always awful, but it wasn't as horrible as the first film.*"

The retribution Christy takes in *Déjà Vu* is twofold - she seeks to avenge the wrongdoing to her mother and her own sexual assault. In both films, the revenge aspect is the most satisfying part and is almost a cathartic way to get over the harrowing actions of the perpetrators for the viewers. We asked both Camille and Jamie what they're favourite 'kill' was. "*I would say the hanging,*" Camille told us. "*The bath scene was a good one, though.*" It's probably the most famous moment of the original film, and indeed, the scene that was talked about whenever the film was mentioned back in the early '80s. "*The thing I remember most about the bath scene was that we'd already shot a scene for after that and my hair is up - when I'm rocking in the rocking chair.*" Camille continues, "*But Meir wanted my hair down in the bathroom. I said you can't have me walking out of the bathroom with my hair down then all of a sudden it's up!*" As for her victim, satisfyingly cut off in his prime, Camille revealed: "*The other actor, Eron Tabor,*











wasn't nervous at all about doing that scene, I think I would have been if I was in his shoes."

Without going too far into spoilers for *Déjà Vu*, Jamie has a similar emasculating moment involving a bottle and one of her attackers: "*Jonathan [Pearcy] was great, he had great reactions. That was a very exciting day. They didn't show all of it in the film, but the running around and his screaming was fantastic.*" Her favourite kill was "*when I come out of the grave and attack the old lady with the shovel - that was just the best!*" They were clearly having a fun time on the set despite the subject matter. Producer Terry Zarchi has his thoughts on that: "*We really enjoyed all the gore scenes, like Herman getting the sickle in his back, and Kevin getting the bottle in between his legs - those scenes were where we were having a good time.*"

The depiction of rape and any sexual assault is always problematic, but the filmmakers handled everything sensitively on set, ensuring the actors were made to feel safe. The films in the *I Spit on Your Grave* series depict strong women who fight back and, although taking the law into their own hands, get their redemption. If *Déjà Vu* offers any moral, it's that an eye for an eye isn't the way to go - the vengeance would never stop. As Terry Zarchi said to us: "*It's a never-ending cycle of blood.*"

The I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE 6-disc box set is out now on Blu-ray and DVD.





"I thought that Meir went easy on me, to be honest!"

- Jamie Bernadette

TRUTH BE TOLD

WORDS: ED FORTUNE

Following on from our TRUTH SEEKERS set-visit last issue, we speak with the driving forces behind Prime Video's excellent new supernatural comedy series, SIMON PEGG, NICK FROST, and SAMSON KAYO...

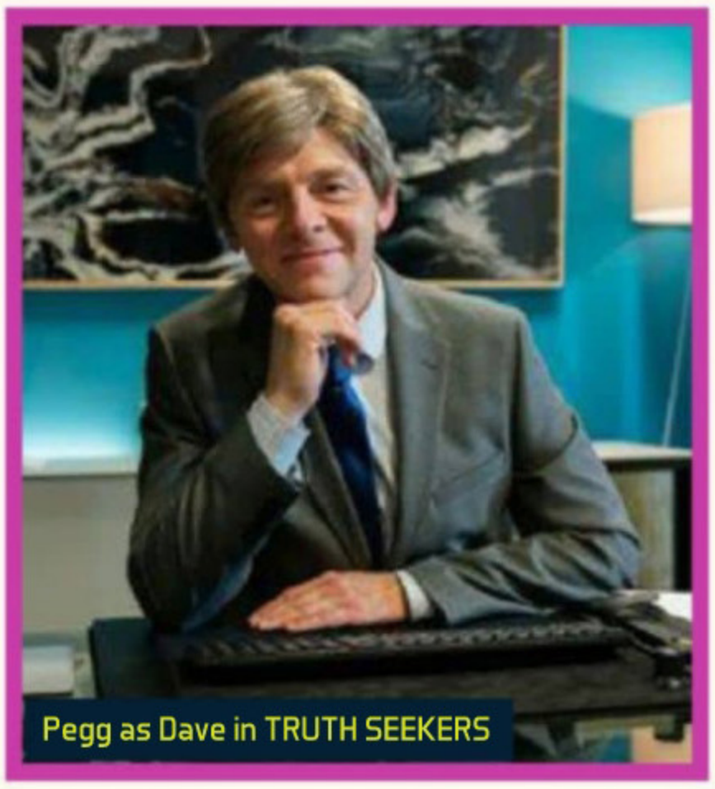
SIMON PEGG

STARBURST: How would you describe *Truth Seekers* to an elderly relative?
Simon Pegg: An elderly relative? Like Nick Frost? [Laughs] We're each other's elderly relatives, I think! It's a story about an old ghost hunter who takes on a younger ghost hunter and together they go on adventures.

How did it all come about?
When Nick and I started Stolen Pictures, our production company, a few years back, we both came with our own sort of little slates of stuff we've been developing separately and apart. *Truth Seekers* was developed by Nick with James Serafinowicz in the days when we were working out of the Big Talk basement and we basically just gathered together all the stuff that we kind of had in our back pocket. We created Stolen Pictures, and that idea was one of those that was 'ready to go' in terms of getting made.

You're a massive *X-Files* fan, and you've had the opportunity to do your own kind of supernatural paranormal investigation. Why did you choose to play the character of Dave, the middle manager?
I had some availability issues and it didn't look like I was going to be able to play a greater part in the show. But I obviously wanted to be part of it. So Dave seemed like the obvious choice.

What's been your favourite part of the production so far?
It was lovely just to get on set. I didn't do my stuff on the show until the very last week of production. It was nice to sort of get back on set and work with Nick. I hadn't been on a set with him since *The World's End*, so it was really lovely to get back into our old sort of familiar working process. And any time I can get to hang out with Nick on set is always a delight; you get to meet the new younger cast and hang out with Malcolm McDowell and talk about *Star Trek* and stuff. That was fun.



Pegg as Dave in TRUTH SEEKERS

It was fun to be on set. Also my daughter and her best friend appeared briefly in the convention episode as a couple of little cosplay players who give Nick the finger. It was a very proud moment for me.

How was it comparing *Star Trek* notes with Malcolm McDowell?
It's funny because when we met, we bonded on sort of like a *Star Trek* alumni. You know, we were in that little club and he told me a few funny stories from the set of *Generations*. And then we just chatted about the experience of being part of that universe. And it's lovely. I mean, he's a great guy. Malcolm has got some top stories. It's always a treat when you meet someone that you've admired for many years and you find them to be as delightful as they were.

"I felt like that was the end of my Star Wars fandom ... sometimes you just don't want to be in the stuff you like."
- Simon Pegg

Why do we keep coming back to ghost stories? Why are we fascinated with that sort of thing?
I think it's probably just that sort of hope deep down that there is something more than just the physical world that we can perceive. I think that there's a thrill and a delight in the idea that there's more to the universe than we might know. And even to the most sceptical people - of which I am one - it's quite fun to rehearse the idea and imagine a world where those kind of things do exist. It's getting back to the child mind of not knowing everything. It's kind of a thrill ride to face the unknown.

This is very different from something like *Mission: Impossible*. How do you get yourself into a role like Dave?
I don't have to do so much fighting, running, and falling off things in *Truth Seekers*! I think it's a very different world, and I just really wanted Dave to have a terrible wig. And that was essentially my entire prep for the role. I spoke to the hair and makeup designer and we tried on a variety and that one really fit the bill.

There's a lot of new faces in *Truth Seekers*, how did you approach casting?
We started Stolen Pictures with a view to fostering talent. Thinking about where we were when we first started and how good it was. It's definitely part of our remit to generate new stuff from new people.

Talking of fresh faces, your brother Mike Beckingham is in this...
Yeah, he plays my assistant. It was really funny because it's the first time me and Mike have ever worked together and it was really nice to be able to have him on set.

Are there further plans for *Truth Seekers*?
I guess it depends on the reception to the first season. We do have a big plan for Gus and the Truth Seekers, and we have this idea that it would start very small and then gradually become something much bigger and more sort of globally relevant. So that's the kind of hypothetical arc. Time will tell.

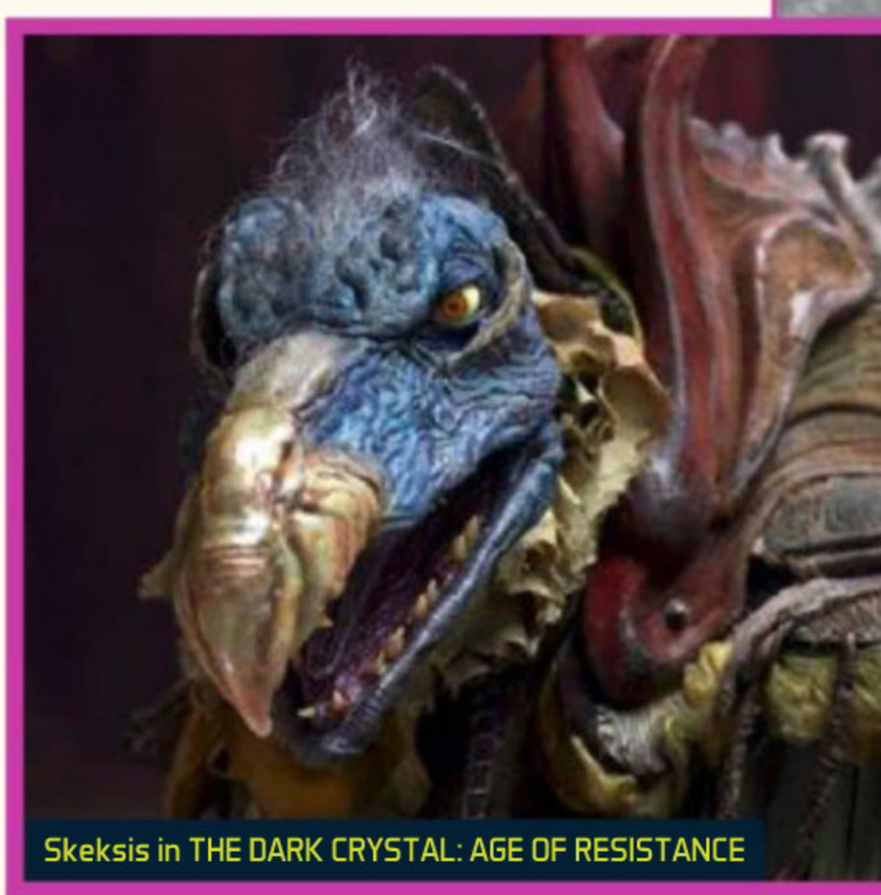
You've been in pretty much every cool sci-fi franchise out there. Is there anything left?
I don't know. I mean, I don't think so. But I am working on something that would quite comfortably sit in the pages of STARBURST, so there's that to come. As I've gotten older, I feel like I fulfilled a lot of my childhood dreams. There are these other avenues now that I'd quite like to stroll down. I'll always be a fan of that sort of genre stuff. Things will come up and I'll think 'I'd quite like to be in that'. But I think in terms of when you're in the thing that you love, you lose the distance from it that made you love it. I didn't really ever recover from being in *The Force Awakens*. I kind of felt like that was the end of my *Star Wars* fandom, it was complete. I did my bit and I was on the set and I had this wonderful time. And then I have literally only seen the ensuing two movies once. It was an interesting thing. So sometimes you just don't want to be in the stuff you like.

We also saw you recently in *The Boys*. If you pick up a copy of the comic book, they've drawn you into it, but in the TV show you play a different character. Was that weird or was that just another day in the life of Simon Pegg?
I found out about that late in 2007 or so. Someone drew it to my attention that the artist was drawing Wee Hughie as me. I got in contact with him and was like, "*Hey man, how's it going?*" I was really flattered. DC published the comic book at the time and wrote to me and asked me to sign over the likeness rights, worried that it would get complicated. But I'm not about that, I was just very chuffed and flattered and I didn't feel in the slightest bit taken advantage of. I felt a bit honoured. So I signed that away! And then DC dropped *The Boys* because it was just too much of a hot potato in terms of its content. I followed the comic on and off over the years. There was an adaptation floating around. And every time it came up, people would go, are you going to play Wee Hughie? And I was gradually getting too old for the role. You know, I think Hughie was probably younger than I was when I first saw it. So when the Amazon show came about, I kind of knew that I wasn't going to get the call. And when I heard Jack Quaid got it, I was really thrilled because I think he's brilliant. And then they phoned up and said 'you should come and be in the show, because you're part of the comic book, and it would be a nice nod to that. And so I said, 'sure, I can play his dad'. But it was really lovely, a nice full stop to that chapter of my life to be the father of the character that I was originally drawn as.

You also recently did some voice work for *The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance*. What was it like being a Skeksis?
It was so brilliant. When I was a kid in '82 walking out of the cinema after seeing it, I was doing all the whinnying noises the Skeksis make! And when the offer came in to play the Chamberlain I thought, this is weird. This is something that I loved as a kid and now I'm part of it. It was a really interesting experience because it's very different to voicing animation. When



As Hugh Campbell in THE BOYS



Skeksis in THE DARK CRYSTAL: AGE OF RESISTANCE

your voice is used in animation, you do your lines and then they animate to your voice, whereas with puppeteering, the puppeteers do the voice and then you kind of have to match their cadences and letters to the mouth flaps, in unison with the puppets, and that's really challenging at times, trying to get the rhythm of the speech. I love, love, love that show.

What's next for Simon Pegg?
I'm just getting back into the seventh *Mission: Impossible* film at the moment. Back in training for that and having three COVID tests a week and going into the studios to train. I'm writing something too, which is a huge project I'm very excited about, but I can't talk about it because it hasn't been announced. And yeah, various other stuff. I always feel disingenuous when I answer this question because I can never tell everybody exactly what I'm doing just because so many things are pending, particularly in this very uncertain period of production. But hopefully, I'll soon be able to be a little bit more effusive about it.

What are the challenges right now with being an actor, writer, and producer during a global pandemic?
I think it's just about maintaining a safe infrastructure for things to continue as normally as possible. With *Mission*, everything is being really rigorously monitored and every member of the crew and cast is frequently tested. There's a spreadsheet that keeps track of where all of us are, and if anything does happen, we'll be able to track and trace every single member of the cast and crew. It's a little microcosm of safety, which is great. And I think it's just all about being sensible and not taking risks. You have to, obviously, to an extent - you're taking a risk just by stepping out the front door. So it's just about being responsible and trying to make sure that you can have your cake and eat it.



Pegg as Unkar Plutt in Star Wars: The Force Awakens

NICK FROST & SAMSON KAYO

While icons such as SIMON PEGG and NICK FROST need little introduction, it was also a pleasure to talk with rising star and comedy genius SAMSON KAYO, who delivers a stand-out performance as broadband engineer/ghost hunter Elton...

STARBURST: We already asked Simon, but how would *you* guys pitch the show to a beloved elderly relative?
Nick Frost: It's a show that you won't enjoy, Nan. It's a 'homedy', a horror-comedy. We wanted to make a horror-comedy where the horror was frightening, the humour was funny, and the characters were believable and flawed and tragic and brave.

Samson Kayo: Yeah, I think it's also quite warm in the relationship between the two and a journey of self-discovery. With a few of the characters, some people are running towards something, and some are running away. So it's like a nice little parallel of personalities that go through this crazy sort of journey, uncovering a bunch of ghosties!

***Truth Seekers* is one of Stolen Pictures' first TV productions, how did this all come about?**
NF: Well, it was an idea that [co-creator/executive producer] James Serafinowicz and I had originally. Simon and I had been ghost-hunting for a long time as friends, and then James and I got the meat and potatoes of the idea together. Originally, we had it with someone else other than Amazon in mind. They stepped in at that point and said, 'hey, we like the idea of it, let's do it'. We had a great set of backers who believed in us, and the notes were great, they really got a sense that they just wanted us to make the best show we could.

When did you realise Samson was the best choice for the project?
NF: The moment I set eyes on him. We did a lot of casting and saw a bunch of Eltons, and to be fair, they were all pretty good. One would come in, and I'd say to the guys, "*Hey, that was pretty good*". And then another one had come in, and I'd say, "Y*ou know what? Now this guy's going to be Elton*". And then Samson came in, and all of us were just blown away after that. You rarely have someone who gets it straight away, and you don't have to explain it. There's a chemistry, and it's alright if you don't talk, it just works. As an actor and a person he can be a tough guy, but he's also very vulnerable, it's rare to see that.



"I was so excited and pumped to be able to be a sponge and soak up what they've got to give."
- Samson Kayo on working with Pegg and Frost.

Samson, what is it about working with such an iconic team, and how have you found it so far?
SK: For me, it was a no brainer once I heard that it was Nick and Simon. I grew up watching a bunch of their stuff; they're legends. I was so excited and pumped to be able to be a sponge and soak up what they've got to give. It was nice because there was a respect that they gave me to allow me to be creatively free in my character. There was a lot of bouncing off of each other; Nick is very giving in terms of improvising, keeping it open for the rest of us to play; making it about the group, building the story and making it funny, it was a great experience.

What was your favourite part of the production?
NF: When it finished [laughs]. I think as an actor, you get to do these things sometimes where you get to see people's

"It doesn't have to be so serious, it can be just people having a laugh."
- Nick Frost

houses and you go into them. There were a few locations we used that were genuinely fucking creepy. You get a chance to go and have a little look around on your own and creep about. I love doing that, and I think any time we got to spend time in our van too was great. I loved driving that van and we'd always have a little nook with a biscuit or a little sweet in there too, it reminds you what it's all about. It doesn't have to be so serious, it can be just people having a laugh, and hopefully, that is what an audience will enjoy as well.

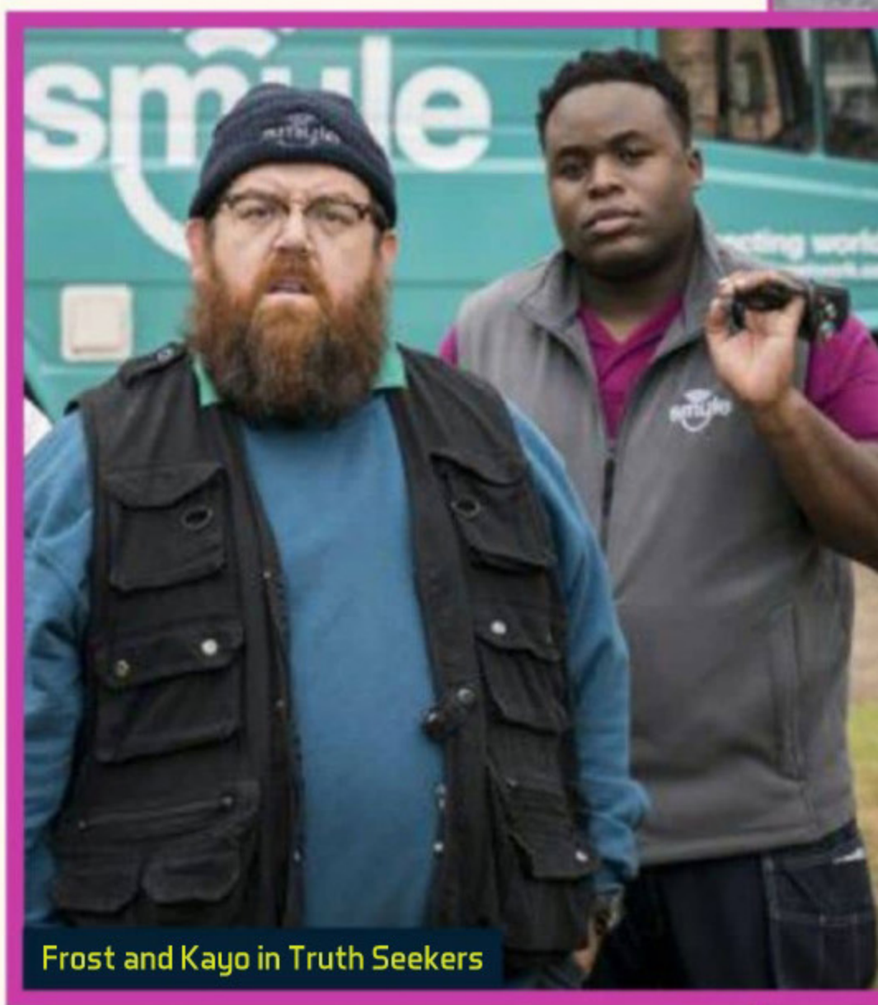
SK: It's like a family day out there, like when we went to the convention. There's a bunch of us in it for the first time; everyone was in the van! For me, what made me feel as though this is going to be a thing was when we were in the hospital and that whole scene with Astrid. The way it looked - that abandoned look - that's what horror looks like to me.

What's next for you guys? Simon mentioned that you've got big plans for further seasons of *Truth Seekers*...

NF: Yeah, we've got an idea for Season 2 and 3, and I'd really love to do it again; I'd love to make it bigger. We're talking about it right now. Although if no one watches this one, then there won't be another season! I've also written a horror film for Orion, which we're hopefully going to shoot next year.

SK: I'm doing a second series of a show I've created called *Slice*, which was on Dave UKTV. Fingers crossed with everything that's going on that we get to do it safely!

TRUTH SEEKERS is available on Prime Video from October 30th.

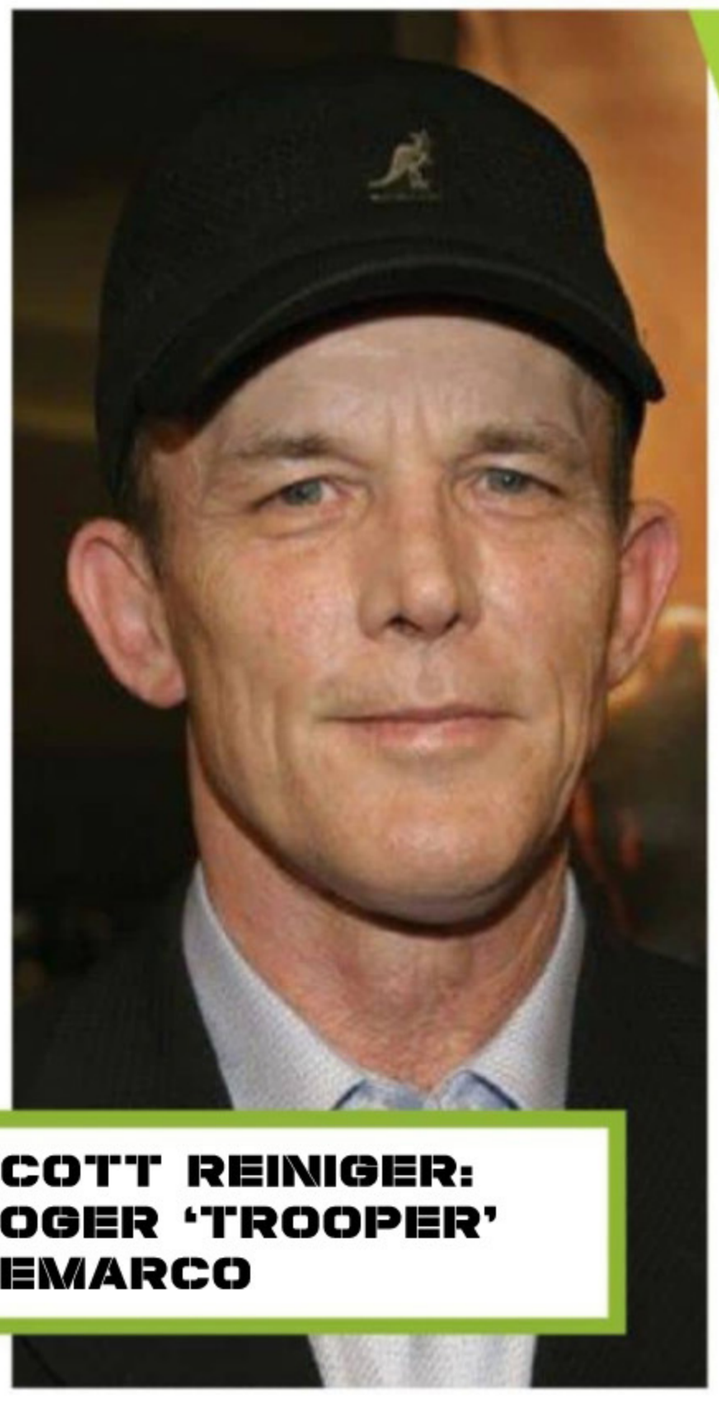

Frost and Kayo in Truth Seekers



WORDS:
MICHAEL COLDWELL

MEMOIRS OF THE DEAD

It's over 40 years since George A. Romero's seminal zombie sequel DAWN OF THE DEAD first terrorised the planet, forever changing our demeanour when visiting the local shopping mall. On the eve of its latest disinterment - this time in 4K - we spoke to two actors who lived to tell the tale…



SCOTT REINIGER: ROGER 'TROOPER' DEMARCO

We all get what's coming to us in the end. Play your cards right and you'll make it to a grand old age and die smiling. Enjoy running around a zombie-infested shopping mall playing tag with the undead? You're SWAT officer Roger DeMarco and your number's up, sunshine - Tom Savini-style. As memorably played by actor Scott Reiniger, Roger was the confident protector of the group who pushed his luck a bit too far. The nascent zombie genre took note, but Roger was the definite article. We cocked our rifle, clenched our privates and took a slide down the memory escalator to 1978 with the man himself…

STARBURST: How did you come to play Roger DeMarco?
Scott Reiniger: Christine Forrest, George Romero's girlfriend [later his wife], called me from New York and said she wanted me to come and audition for it. I said 'sure, send me the script'. It was about 225 pages and was the most violent thing I'd ever read [laughs]. This was quite a piece of work. So, I auditioned for George, he was very relaxed, very open, and very secure with himself. I did two or three scenes and he smiled and said, 'yeah, I really like what you're doing'. I could tell there was something, some subtext behind his voice. He called me back for a second audition and said, 'you know, this is not really what I was thinking about for this character but I really like what you're doing'. I said to him, 'George, what's the 'but' in your voice?' and he said, 'well, I already cast this guy Ken Foree who you'll be playing opposite on screen, and he's twice your size'. I found out subsequently that George was thinking of a big, burly Nick Nolte-type for Roger.

How did you talk Romero round?
I said, 'George, the audience is going to forget about that after the first 5 minutes!' He laughed and said, 'OK, I'll think about it'. Later that night, I saw him and he put his arm on my shoulder and said, 'you've got the part'. My take was Roger's an ex-marine and military sharp-shooter, the only kind of life that he can thrive on is a life of danger and living on the edge. He prides himself on being able to control any and all situations but he gets in a situation in ***Dawn*** where everything gets out of control.









Almost from the start, in fact. The opening of *Dawn* is a sensory overload, with the manic scenes at the local TV station cutting to the housing project stakeout where we first meet Roger, trying to stay cool with zombies on the loose. Was this the first scene you shot?
That was the first thing we did, in the tenement building. It was very cold and we went down to the cage in the basement where all the zombies were eating each other. I walked in there for the first time and I said, in a humorous way, 'George, this is disgusting!' He looked at me, smiled, and said 'yeah, I know!' A lot of the violence was in the script, but I was startled looking at it in reality.

Up until that point, major shopping malls were still a relatively new and exciting concept. A couple of years before *Dawn of the Dead*, MGM had used one as the groovy, futuristic setting for *Logan's Run* (1976). Romero had other ideas about them…
During the time we were shooting the movie, an article came out in Newsweek with the cover line 'The Malling of America' which was all about what was to come in the future. We thought 'well this is all pretty prophetic!' I got the satire on consumerism and what was happening from George's point of view while we were shooting. You don't see that on the page as much as 'in the 'doing'.

Given you were shooting overnight and had the mall to yourselves, how much of the 'cat and mouse' game the humans play with the zombies was improvised?
Some of the physical action was improvised to make use of the location - running around with the different stores. Kenny and I in the two trucks making fun of each other, that's all improvised too. George was very flexible about that.

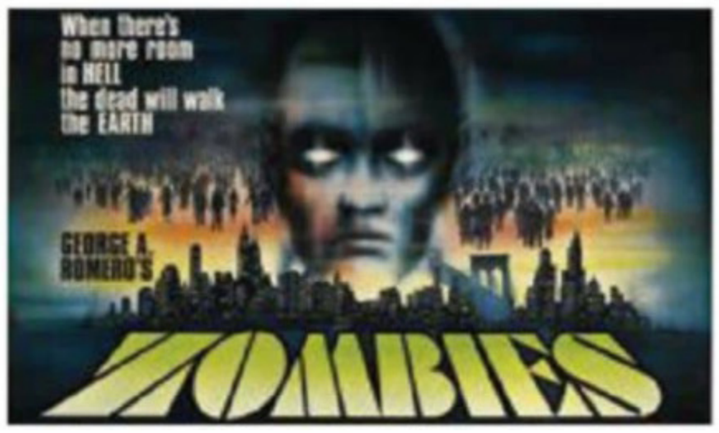
Your famous slide down between the escalators has been the undoing of many a drunken Millwall fan on the London Underground. Was that your idea?
It was actually, I said to George, 'what if I slide down the middle? You can just have somebody spot me at the bottom so I don't fall and break my back!'

Roger's 'resurrection' as a zombie at the end of the film is an incredibly powerful moment after all we've seen the ensemble go through. What was the makeup process?
It was great to work with Tom Savini. The makeup took about an hour and a half, there was no prosthetic or latex or anything. What he did was put this very fine tissue on my face repeatedly and sprayed it with a solution, then he blow-dried my face. He did it over and over until my skin started to shrink and caused all of these wrinkles. Then he put the makeup on top of it. I like the raw, real makeup.

What do you remember about the reaction to the film on its US release in 1979?
It was mixed, I generally got good feedback for my own performance but I was worried somewhat because the film was so violent and if that was a good career move. But I wanted to do the film because it has a great arc to it - what Roger evolves into, what happens, and what changes him.

DAWN OF THE DEAD machetes our skulls in 4K on November 16th with a mammoth box set from Second Sight Films.





"THE 'SLICING' WAS COURTESY OF SOME DEFTLY-JERKED FISHING WIRE."



JIM KRUT: HELICOPTER ZOMBIE

It's a landmark in special make-up effects and the moment ***Dawn of the Dead*** - already a savage satire and kick-ass action-horror movie - bared its considerable comic teeth. As our small band of heroes prepare to escape the chaos of the undead plague in a TV helicopter, a lone zombie with a conspicuously high cranium lurches into view and ambles forward. Stumbling over some wooden crates, he emits a blood-curdling zomboid snarl and prepares to strike, only to get the top of his head sliced clean off by the 'copter's rotor blades. For actor Jim Krut, this half-minute of cult carnage has become a calling card, garnering him further horror movie roles, his own range of 'Helicopter Zombie' merchandise and a dedicated fan following...

STARBURST: So Jim, how did you come to find yourself under the blades of a helicopter, just outside Pittsburgh in early 1978?

Jim Krut: I had been working as an actor in Pittsburgh for about five years with two different theatre companies. Tom Savini, who did all the make-up and effects for ***Dawn of the Dead***, and I had gone to college together and we actually did some theatre in college as well. After being in the army for a couple of years, I came back to Pittsburgh and ran into Tom again. He said 'hey, I've got this great role for you, George Romero is making this movie called ***Dawn of the Dead***'.

How long did the helicopter scene take to shoot?

Two days on set. A few weeks before that, Tom had me come to his workshop to do the prosthetics, the head casting, with me having to breathe through a straw while it was tested out. That took two hours for the first session and then a couple of days later, Tom called and said 'Jim, we've got to do it again, the plaster has cracked...' [laughs]. That's where I developed my claustrophobia, I think.

How was it working with George Romero?

For me it was pretty exciting, it was my first film. We were shooting at the little Monroeville airport. George was the most lovable man, in the way he directed, the way he handled things - very sharp but a good sense of humour. He knew how to work with people, how to get the best out of them and he had all this in his head, all these disparate elements that only he knew how to bring together. I had total admiration for George.

There's a nostalgia for when effects were being achieved in-camera and done 'for real', your stunt does look pretty dangerous...

Well, I was certainly standing right ***next*** to the helicopter but the blades were 'cut-in' later as an optical effect, the 'slicing' was courtesy of some deftly-jerked fishing wire**.** Tom had done a lot of planning and George trusted him considerably, especially when it came to complicated scenes like this where, for the most part, Tom directed it. It was really a matter of precise timing: coordinating the top of the head coming off with the blood coming out at the same time.

You can show your gratitude to Jim by visiting the Helicopter Zombie emporium: www.helizombie.com

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SHORT AND TO THE POINT

BY MARTIN UNSWORTH

Short films have become a popular staple of film festivals but SHORT SHARP SHOCKS, the 41st release from BFI Flipside, shows us that the format has been used for much more commercial means previously...

MOST people are familiar with the short-form movie. Be it from film festivals or on video platforms such as YouTube. They are an excellent vehicle for budding filmmakers to hone their craft and get noticed. In the past, though, they were regularly churned out and used as supporting programmes for big films. Readers of a particular vintage will remember seeing travelogues or documentaries about skateboarders and the like (yes, kids, 'boarding was a thing in the '70s too) before settling down to watch the big feature. This tradition hails from cinema's early days when films were made to run to the length of the film in the camera. Later, '2-reelers' featuring the likes of Laurel and Hardy or The Three Stooges made the format popular, with studios churning out hundreds of shorts. The Academy Awards recognised this early on, with the first live-action short film category awarded in 1931. Various configurations of Oscars were handed out over the years until the current version was settled on in 1974.

One of the first interesting genre-related shorts was ***Return to Glennascaul*** (1951), written and directed by Hilton Edwards and starring Orson Welles. The legendary actor plays himself, the premise being him driving through the Irish countryside while taking a break from making ***Othello***. It's a ghost story, just the type of tale that suits the short form. Think of the celebrated series of M.R. James stories that were adapted by the BBC in the '70s to give us Christmas chills and you'll get the idea. Often with a Gothic feel, these post-war shorts would play as part of a full night out at the cinema, alongside B-movies and newsreels.

"THE STORIES ARE NOT THOSE OF SURPRISE OR HORROR, BUT MORE QUIET APPREHENSION WITH NOTIONS OF THE UNCANNY."

By the early '50s, funding for some short films came from the British Film Institute. Genre legends such as Norman J. Warren (***Satan's Slaves***) would get their first taste of cinematic action thanks to the BFI's involvement. The new collection, ***Short Sharp Shocks***, released by BFI Flipside - which deals with releasing British movies that have been neglected; the seedier, more sleazy films that tend to interest us more than the populist classics - features seven shorts that have been lovingly restored and transferred in HD. They range from experimental narrative works to straight-faced ghost story recitals. In the latter category, they are practically quaint by today's standards. ***Lock Your Door*** and ***The Reformation of St Jules*** were both made in 1949 and are perfect examples of fire-side ghost tales. They are told, with no narrative cutaways, by the writer Algernon Blackwood. His stories, particularly ***The Wendigo***, are still being adapted today and at the time he would tell his tales on the radio and television. These two filmed versions have Blackwood recollecting from his parlour. The effect is like sitting down with a great grandfather. He appears awkward in front of the camera, rarely looking into the lens, but this adds to the eeriness. The stories are not those of surprise or horror, but more quiet apprehension with notions of the uncanny. It's hard to imagine a modern audience getting much out of them at the local multiplex, but no doubt at the time they would be enough to send some shivers down the spine.

Another stagey-but-brilliant inclusion is the 1953 version of ***The Tell-Tale Heart***. Edgar Allan Poe's story has been brought to the screen many times and suits the short form. Directed by J.B. Williams, it has the great Stanley Baker asking us: "***Why would you say that I am mad?***" Poe's prose is presented as a monologue and works perfectly as such here, with Baker showing the promise that his career proved.



Lock Your Door



Death Was a Passenger



The Lake



The collection also contains some shorts presented as traditional narrative tales. ***Death Was a Passenger*** and ***Portrait of a Matador*** (both 1958) are two intriguing stories directed by Theodore Zichy, who was perhaps better known as an actor, appearing in Powell and Pressburger's ***The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*** (1943). The former has 'know-his-face' actor Terrence Alexander recounting a lucky escape he had while trying to flee the Nazis on a train at the start of WWII. The latter is a more genre-friendly affair in which an artist is tormented by the arrival of a portrait he painted a year earlier - that of a bullfighter. The subject hated it and was killed in the ring soon after, and the artist is convinced the canvas bears a curse.

The release features a brace of shorts that are more akin to the ones that we recall seeing in the fleapits. ***Twenty-Nine*** (1969) sees a man (***Goodbye Gemini***'s Alexis Kanner) awaken in a strange apartment, unaware of what had occurred the previous night and trying to put the pieces of his fractured memory together (while keeping his wife from finding out whatever it was). Like an episode of ***Tales of the Unexpected***, this has a lovely little twist, and a surprising appearance from ***George and Mildred***'s Yootha Joyce, as well as giving us a small glimpse of Soho in the sixties. ***The Sex Victims*** (1973) has a modern-day Lady Godiva (Felicity Devonshire) leading a trucker astray only to have him and his friend (Alun Armstrong) come to a sticky end. ***The Lake*** (1978) is an atmospheric tale in which a couple (Gene Foad and Julie Peasgood) enjoy a picnic in the grounds of a farmhouse, where previously, the owner had killed his family and livestock. It was written and directed by Lindsey C. Vickers, who was an assistant director on several latter Hammer movies, and it's a beautifully shot, eerie tale. Finally, there's ***The Errand*** (1980), which follows a soldier tasked with retrieving a message and coming off worse for it. This one has significant genre credentials as it was written by David McGillivray, best known for his screenplays directed by Pete Walker and Norman J. Warren. A keen eye might be able to spot FrightFest supremo Alan Jones, too.

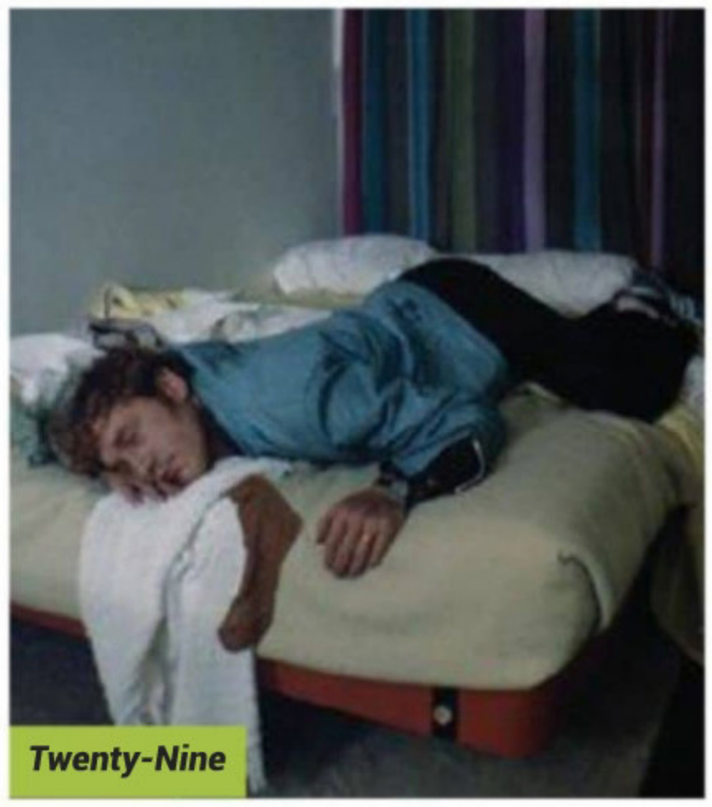


The Errand

The popularity of the feature-length double bill, and then the abandoning of continuous performances at cinemas spelt the end of the short as a theatrical treat. As mentioned, they now tend to get festival-only screenings before being released to YouTube and the like. It's also becoming increasingly popular to repackage them into anthology features, which at least gives them more exposure.

Acknowledgements and thanks are given to Vic Pratt from BFI Flipside for providing insight when putting this feature together.

BFI Flipside's SHORT SHARP SHOCKS hits Blu-ray on November 16th.



Twenty-Nine



Portrait of a Matador



The Sex Victims

HEART and SOUL

by Andrew Dex

Known for re-shaping the landscape of movies as we know it (not just animated ones), Pixar has respectfully raised the bar with delightful, heartfelt aplomb. From the intense opening segment of *Up* where no matter how lacking in emotion you think you are, tears will still come running, to the joyous Randy Newman-scored *Toy Story* moments, to the roaring, superhero family dynamics in *The Incredibles*, there's an endless array of remarkable Pixar memories. Even in just these highlighted animated spectacles alone, Pixar has imprinted many sequences into our brains that we will never, ever forget. Everyone has a favourite Pixar character, scene, quote, song, and catchphrase that still evokes something nostalgically magical in them. So, what's yours?

There's a long list of reasons as to why Pixar has become such a household name over the world since *Toy Story* dominated the box office way back in 1995 (yes, it's *that* old), but for now, we'll do our best to break it down to two big pointers. First, the animation itself is loaded with detail; including, for the more die-hard fans, Easter Eggs aplenty. If *Toy Story* played in cinemas today, it would still hold its own visually. Secondly, the storytelling is key. Sure, the majority of animated films tend to do very well at the box office, but even the adult cinema-goer will naturally pick Pixar films first, because they know that the story they'll get will tend to be something that they can enjoy just as much as the younger members of the audience. Every character that takes to the stage in a Pixar episode is there for a reason, and even though the narrative is contained within the most unreal of universes, it always resonates on a personal level. Pixar knows what it takes to strike a meaningful chord with its audience (of all ages). Yes, the studio has achieved endless awards, and broken numerous box office records, but for them, it seems that they want their movies to be a talking point for decades, dare we say, centuries to come, while ensuring that you, the viewer, are utterly engrossed in what they project.

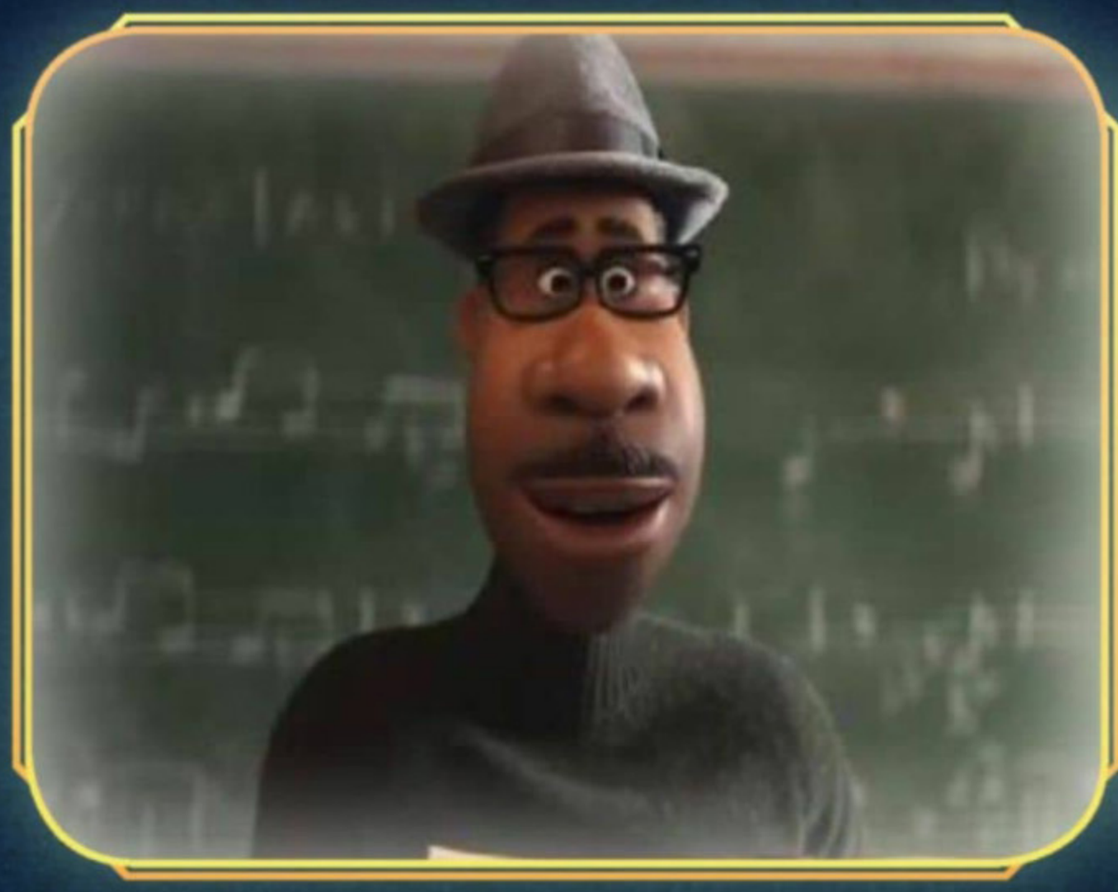


INSIDE THE SOUL OF SOUL

So, maybe you already know why Pixar is extraordinary, and just want to know a bit more about their latest project? Well, you're in the right place. Heading to screens soon is the 23rd Pixar addition, *Soul*. Set in the hectic, never-sleeping New York City, middle-aged teacher Joe Gardner (Jamie Foxx) finally gets the chance to show off his jazz skills but tragically falls down a manhole on the way home from his successful audition. This unfortunate accident takes him to an afterlife of sorts (and subsequently, a 'before-life', if you will), and brings him into contact with a young soul in training, Tina Fey's 22. With the help of this close-minded, quirky soul, they work together in an effort to get Joe back to his reality - the land of the living. If you've seen the short preview footage out there already, then you'll be aware that what you are about to witness is going to be stuffed with heartfelt messages, jaw-dropping animation, and an uplifting soundtrack. Keep your loved ones close, because as we've already mentioned, a tear or two, or three, or even a whole river full could make an appearance.

When it comes to playing a musician, Jamie Foxx has plenty of experience in that field, and if you don't believe us, then we'd strongly advise that you watch the incredible *Ray* to see why he's simply the essential actor to portray, and amplify, *Soul*'s lead. Also







unafraid of the animation circuit, and completing this lead pairing, is Tina Fey. With her work as Roxanne Ritchi in the Dreamworks superhero hit *Megamind* being just one example, Tina is already well established in the voice-acting arena, and we have every confidence that she is going to bring something brilliant (once again!) to the table. Recently putting the soundtrack together for the sensational sci-fi series *Watchmen*, and on a mission to not be typecast into doing a particular sound/style going forward, Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross score *Soul* with their masterful musicianship. Not forgetting Jon Batiste, who will provide Joe's Jazz-filled, foot-tapping tracks.

PREPARE TO BE CHALLENGED

One of the strongest aspects of a Pixar movie is the sometimes life-changing hidden messages within each of them. When the credits roll, you could potentially be sat there staring at the screen, thinking just how close, and true, that said message is to something in your own life. If you haven't figured it out by this point, then let us completely confirm that Pixar is extraordinarily good at getting their audience to make sure that they have their real priorities in check. "So what do you want to be remembered for", "What would you want to be known for on Earth?", "Don't waste your time on all the junk of life", "Spend your precious hours doing what will bring out the real you", are just some of the profound questions *Soul* presents. Be prepared to be emotionally overwhelmed, and if *Soul* has you making even a small but positive change to your day-to-day life and/or thought process, then how special is that?

STEERING THE 23rd PIXAR FILM

Director Pete Docter has piloted some of the biggest and best Pixar films in history - including *Monsters, Inc.*, *Up*, and *Inside Out* - and now he's continuing to do what he does best here, namely bringing exceptional, fictional stories to fruition. With this award-winning animated director attached to a project like *Soul*, it's already a guaranteed certainty that the film should be on your radar. Earning himself a co-directing credit, and working alongside Pete Docter, is Kemp Powers. Mainly known for his writing work on *Star Trek: Discovery*, we're excited to see what he can bring to such an already renowned and respected field of collaborators. Some may be sceptical, however, if anyone knows how to successfully put together a skilful crew of talented minds - that produces something so above and beyond - then it's Pixar. Like we touched upon earlier, the story is of critical importance in a Pixar outing, and with *Soul*, it has carefully been constructed together by Docter, Powers, producer Mike Jones, and Fey herself. With this collaborating unit, and by looking at the past projects between them, you can expect to see a faultless writing take. One that will satisfy both new and long-time Pixar fans.

WHY IS SOUL WORTH YOUR PRECIOUS TIME?

In an age where we are inundated with incredible new movies/TV shows to watch, it's important to choose titles that are going to leave a lasting memory, something that you can share with others. With the astonishing track record that Pixar has for turning family movies into stories that can be cherished forever, ones that actually challenge their audiences to think outside the box, to maybe make them realise what's really essential in life, it's abundantly evident that *Soul* will be more than worth seeking out on release. Pixar is so good at making each of their created worlds feel separate to one another, as each seems to majestically stand on their own with a unique DNA, instead of directly recycling the best ideas from its predecessor. They have the forward thinking ability to stay fresh, exciting, and mind-blowing, and *Soul* will most probably tick all of those much-loved Pixar boxes, while being able to at least match what's come before it. Might we add that for a studio that takes its time with its releases, then how lucky are we to have not just one (*Onward*), but two Pixar films in a single year! Magic.

Pixar's SOUL will be available on Disney+ from Christmas Day.



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Anime is a wonderful thing – it's a form of animation unlike anything you've ever seen. So many iconic characters and worlds have been born in the wonderfully creative minds from our friends in the East – from *Dragon Ball* to *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*, Anime has something for everyone. Each issue, Road to Otaku will throw the spotlight on several essential anime works that every reader, no matter how new they are to the medium, should add to their Watchlists immediately!

KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF EIZOUKEN!

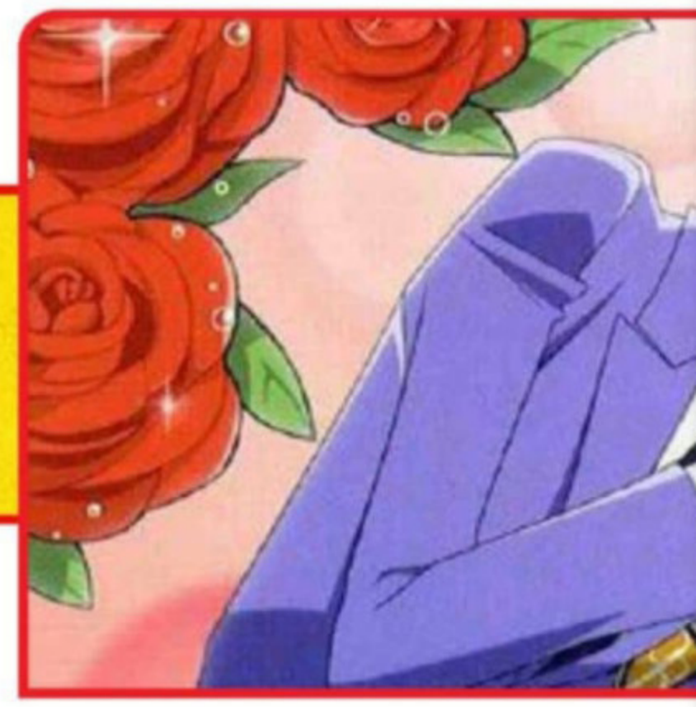
Things are about to get meta as we explore an anime about making anime with *Keep Your Hands Off Eizouken!*, arguably the most popular title of 2020. Based on Sumito Ōwara's manga of the same name, the story follows three high schoolers on their journey to create an afterschool club where they can realise their dreams of creating anime – the only problem is, there's already an anime club, meaning they have to cheat the system!

Helmed by the masterful Masaaki Yuasa and his team at studio Science SARU (now run by CEO Eunyoung Choi whom we interviewed in issue 471), this anime is a must-see.

Midori Asakusa, an extremely talented introvert, wants to create anime but doesn't know where to start. With the help of her money-loving friend Sayaka Kanamori and their new acquaintance Tsubame Mizusaki, who dreams of breaking free of her demanding parents' clutches to become an animator, the three girls set off on breath-taking, imagination-fuelled journeys to far away lands filled with aliens and robots.

What makes the anime the masterpiece that it is, is not just the characters and their unmatchable chemistry or the gorgeous jaw-dropping animation, but it's the fact that the story is so relatable, not just to animators, but people who strive to achieve their dreams and goals. The trio encounter so many obstacles but their passion and friendship allow them to overcome each and every one, including pressurising peers and monetary issues. The writing is also so perfect that it manages to balance some very emotional and real narrative points while also making it side-splittingly funny and engaging.









Topped off with one of the greatest opening themes of all-time with *Easy Breezy*, the series isn't just essential viewing for anime fans, but also for creative professionals or those looking at getting into any form of the creative business.

Where to Watch: Crunchyroll

OURAN HIGH SCHOOL HOST CLUB

It's time to go back to school in this quintessential romantic comedy, as before *Kaguya-sama: Love is War* came Haruhi Fujioka and the brilliant *Ouran High School Host Club*. Set in the prestigious Tokyo rich-kid school, Ouran Academy, new student Fujioka becomes entangled in the school's 'Host Club', a club where six boys entertain female students with high society etiquette, delicious sweets, and hot tea. After stumbling upon the club, she gets mistaken for being a boy due to her short hair, gender-neutral face and features, and quickly becomes a top host due to her impeccable mannerisms with the female guests.

Similar to last issues' focus on *Zombieland Saga* changing a lot of people's perspectives on the 'Idol' genre, this is one of the earlier examples of heads being turned towards romantic comedies in the world of anime. From its larger than life characters, all with unique personalities, to some truly magical moments, *Ouran High School Host Club* is a great example of how anime truly is for anyone and everyone. It is also, quite aptly, a parody of the Otaku culture in general, with focus on the flamboyant costumes and obsessive natures of some of the characters.

After first debuting in 2006 it has gathered a cult following and has also spawned a visual novel which was released on the PlayStation 2 in Japan in 2007 and a live-action TV series and film in 2011 and 2012, respectively.

Where to Watch: FUNimation, Crunchyroll

NAPPING PRINCESS

A dream journey into a fantasy realm has direct consequences on the real world in Kenji Kamiyama's brilliant *Napping Princess: The Story of the Unknown Me*.

While taking naps during the day, Kokone Morikawa dreams of the Heartland Society, a city in a world dominated by machines and technology. During her dreams, Kokone assumes the role of Ancien, the daughter of the King of Heartland. Ancien possesses a magical tablet which allows her to bring life to inanimate objects such as her blue toy bear Joy and her motorcycle heart.

In the real world, Kokone lives with her mechanic father after her mother tragically passed away many years ago.

She soon begins to realise the parallels between her dream life and real life and must find a way save both worlds – the dream world from a molten monster and someone eyeing the throne and in the real world, her father from the clutches of a tyrannical CEO.

Napping Princess is one of the very few examples of a story that has two concurrent storylines and worlds and actually manages to find an engaging and coherent balance from start to finish. Kokone is a wonderful character that the audience can easily attach and relate to, and her journey is thrilling and magical.

The animation is perfectly pitched with the real world and dream world both having their own personalities and the score by Yoko Shimomura (known for her work on *Kingdom Hearts*) is beautifully breath-taking and heart-breaking at the same time.

Napping Princess is one of those anime films in recent years that doesn't get talked about nearly enough with a lot of other high-profile names taking centre stage, which unfortunately pushed the lovely film to the back of the queue for a lot of audiences. If you want to be whisked away to a fantasy land and engage in a compelling story of a young girl and her imagination, seek this one out.

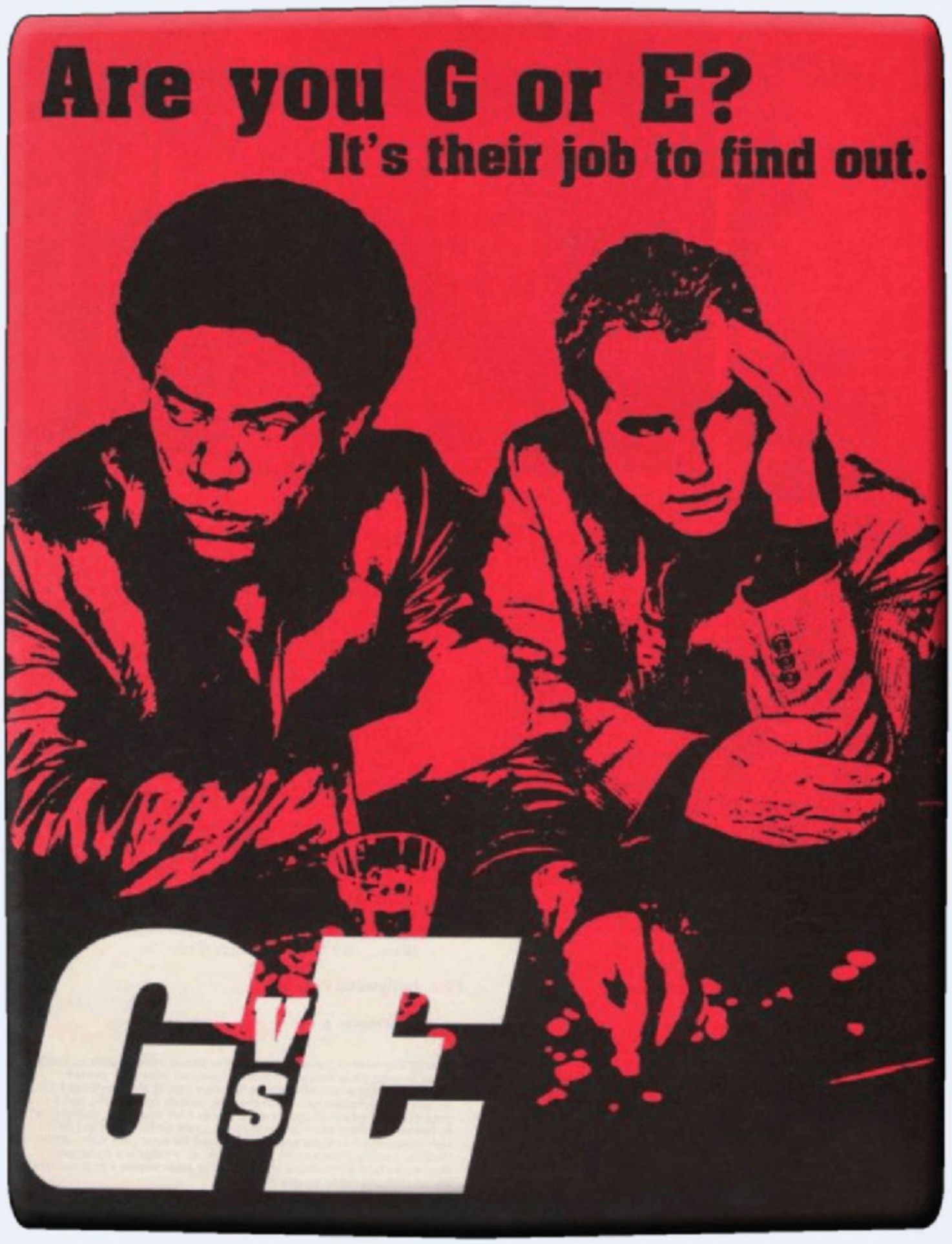
Where to Watch: DVD and Blu-ray

ARIGATŌ GOZAIMASU!





telephemera



GOOD VS EVIL

The vast majority of shows lost to the mists of time – for good reasons and bad – are one-season affairs, and it's a rare thing indeed that makes it to its second season and *still* retains that forgotten gem status. Imagine, though, that such a show not only changed networks between seasons but also underwent an – albeit subtle – change of name, and, in reality, was just one season, cut into two; that's grounds for Telephemera, and that's *Good vs Evil*.

Created by Joshua and Jonas Pate, who made a splash at the 1996 Sundance Film Festival with their debut movie *The Grave*, *Good vs Evil* is the story of two agents of the Corps, an organisation working under the auspices of Heaven, tasked with finding people who have made Faustian deals with Morlocks, agents of Hell.

GvsE – as it was originally titled – debuted on July 21st, 1999 as part of rebranding exercise for the USA Network and given a huge media push, supported by the network's president of programming, Steven Chao. Chao included a personal letter with the show's media kits, sent out to reviewers, stating, "*When I started at USA Networks a little over one year ago, I promised to bring viewers innovative, creative, and compelling new television series. My goal was to develop concepts that stand apart from the standard fare. With that said, it gives me great pride to introduce to you a series that fulfils these intentions - GvsE.*"

Chao had been a divisive figure in his tenure at USA Networks, cancelling long-running shows with hardcore followings like *Silk Stalkings* and *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, and heavily playing up the value to the network of the blue-collar soap opera of the World Wrestling Federation. The USA Network was – and still is – the highest rating cable channel, but trailed behind the big five networks, and Chao hoped that a show by turns edgy, gory, and funny as *GvsE* would make that vital difference.

The Pates tapped into the retro chic aesthetic that had exploded in the mid-1990s with *Pulp Fiction* and the Beastie Boys' *Sabotage* video, creating a world for *GvsE* that was simultaneously modern and anchored in 1970s exploitation movies. The opening episode, written by Jonas Pate, finds Clayton Rohner's Chandler Smythe waking up after having just died to find that he has been recruited into the Corps, and now works for God, trying to save lost souls who have entered into bargains with Satan.

Those who tempt the humans are known as Morlocks – from mortal and warlock, rather than any connection to H.G. Wells – and they have various powers granted to them by their Satanic master. The job of Chandler Smythe – who is quickly partnered with Henry McNeil, a black man who was originally killed in the 1970s and dresses like Richard Rowntree in *Shaft*, played with obvious joy by Richard Brooks – is to prevent the deals being made, or eliminate anyone who has already made such a bargain.

ALAN BOON DELVES INTO THE TELEVISION ARCHIVES TO UNEARTH ANOTHER LONG-FORGOTTEN CURIO...

Smythe and McNeil work out of Ravenswood, one of the busiest Corps stations because it is located in the heart of Hollywood, where Faustian deals are a daily occurrence, and a poster on the wall identifies known Morlocks such as Don King, *Love Boat* captain Gavin McLeod, Senator Orrin Hatch, and LeAnn Rimes. Their immediate superiors are Decker and Ford, but their ultimate boss on Earth is The Deacon, played by NFL Hall of Famer (and *ALF* star) Deacon Jones, who also narrates the show. The final reward for Corps agents is a place in Heaven, because these are people who have not led the best lives but are still redeemable; should they die on the job, however, they face immediate judgment.

GvsE aired weekly through to the end of August, before taking a break and returning in October for a four-weekly run of the remaining episodes leading to the planned mid-season break, *Cliffhanger*. Earning a 2.7 Nielsen rating on its debut, well below the big five network shows but higher than any show on USA Network other than wrestling, the show started strong but despite the support of Steven Chao, USA Network owner Barry Diller apparently hated the show, and after its break it was moved from its 8pm timeslot to 10pm. This later showing, coupled with the break in fresh episodes and no longer benefitting from having *WWF Sunday Night Heat* as a lead-in show, led ratings to fall, and the show was effectively cancelled, at least as far as USA Network viewers were concerned.

GvsE had always been planned to air on the Sci-Fi Channel, also owned by USA Networks, but when Steven Chao saw the first few completed episodes he insisted it would air on the company's flagship channel. Thus, although USA Network viewers no longer found *GvsE* in their weekly schedule, fans of the rebranded Sci-Fi (they dropped the Channel, and would eventually become Syfy in 2009) were treated to *Good vs Evil* on Friday nights, taking the slot of the recently-ended *Sliders*.

Other than the subtle name tweak, little changed for Smythe and McNeil between 'seasons', and the Sci-Fi run kicked off with a double-shot, *Nurse Evil* and *Renunciation*, providing a perfect introduction into the world of the Corps for new viewers, and furthering the story for continuity fans. The reaction to the new episodes was good, and ratings were strong for Sci-Fi, but *Good vs Evil* still wasn't receiving support from the USA Networks higher-ups, following the lead of Barry Diller, and the run of twenty-two episodes (eleven on each network) finished with no news of whether the show would be renewed.

The Pate brothers didn't wait around to find out what would happen to their baby, instead announcing their plans to return to producing feature films, having found success with *The Grave* and 2007's *Deceiver*. Clayton Rohner, however, told the *Houston Press* that the show was cancelled, and that he had been released from his contract, but said that he'd enjoyed the show so much that he filmed the pilot for just a $50 fee.

As it turned out, Rohner was right; USA Networks decided the $800,000 per episode was poor value in the face of the $150,000 per episode they paid for buy-ins such as *Lexx*. The show was picked up in several international markets, and the full run aired in the UK on Sky One during the summer of 2000, but it has never been released on home video, despite a cult following that continues to this day, with fans evangelising about *Good vs Evil*'s qualities, and you can find a complete run of the show on the usual video sharing sites if you search hard enough.

The history of genre TV is littered with shows cancelled before their time, and although it's tempting to think of today as a golden age for fantasy TV, we still see too many great premises not given the time to find their feet. The fate of *Good vs Evil*, however, seems unusually harsh; this was a fully-realised, stylish, *unique* show, years ahead of its time and with great performances from its principals and guest stars. If you can find it, give it a watch – honestly, it's worth making a deal with the Devil.





STAND BY FOR SHADO

BY FRED MCNAMARA

This autumn marks the 50th anniversary of Gerry Anderson's evolution from producing Supermarionation to live-action TV shows with UFO. We take a fond look back on a complex, mature series that took Century 21 Productions to new creative heights…

IDENTIFIED

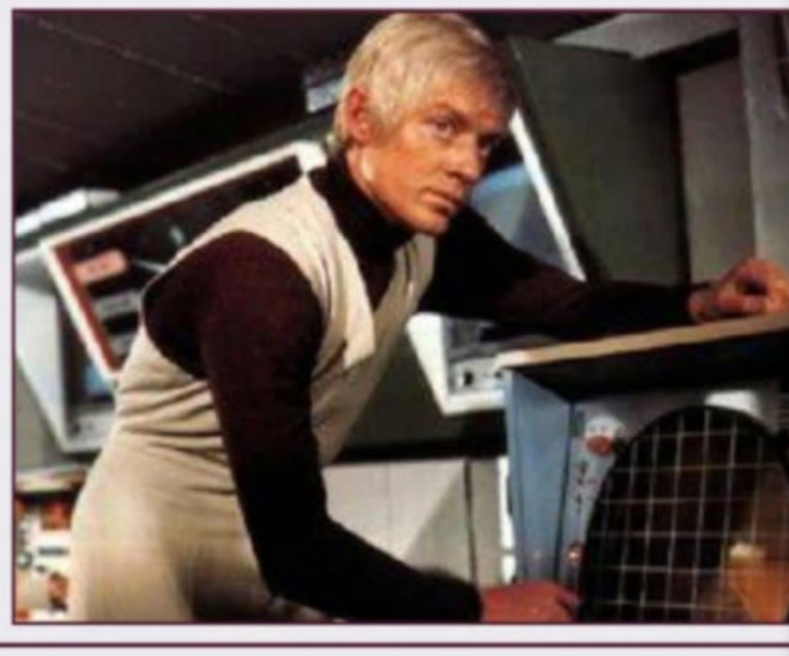
In January 1969, an incredible era of British television came to an end when the puppet studios of Century 21 Productions were closed down. The final Supermarionation TV series produced by the company, *The Secret Service*, had a far shorter lifespan than its predecessors, lasting only 13 episodes compared to the usual 30-40 episode length from past efforts. The exact story as to why *The Secret Service* came to a premature end may never be known. Puppet master Gerry Anderson often told the story of showing the first finished episode to ITC's Lew Grade, the financial backer of his work during this era, and Grade's reaction being less than positive.

Stanley Unwin's trademark gobbledygook language of Unwinese, utilised as part of the show's premise, is the given reason for the show's ultimate failure. However, one can't help but wonder why Lew Grade would have commissioned such a series when he must have known full-well what he was signing up for. Given Gerry's long-held ambitions during this time to move permanently away from the super marionettes that had given him great success and greater frustration, one wonders if *The Secret Service*'s polarising set-up was a deliberate, tactical shot in the foot made to convince Grade that the era of Supermarionation was over.

It had been three years since Grade brought the axe down on *Thunderbirds* and nothing produced since had quite managed to overtake that juggernaut's popularity. Still, Anderson remained focused, resolute, determined to make the next big thing. During the same month the puppet studios finished, January 1969 brought with it the finished script for the first episode of Century 21's new venture – *UFO*.

Century 21 Productions were no strangers to filming in live-action at this point. The much-maligned *Crossroads to Crime* and the thematic precursor to *UFO*, *Doppelgänger*, had given Gerry





and Sylvia and their crew some tangible experience in working with humans. Numerous live-action inserts of hands and feet are scattered throughout the Supermarionation shows, and *The Secret Service* can really be described as only half being filmed in Supermarionation. But *UFO* marked more than the great leap forward into working with humans rather than puppets. Everything about *UFO* is more sophisticated than what had come before. Targeting a more adult audience than the puppet shows had done, *UFO* remains a thematically robust, narratively engaging and sometimes quite emotional and bleak entry in British sci-fi, propelled by a renewed vigour in the special effects department, more complex story-telling and commanding performances from its cast.

INTERCEPTORS, IMMEDIATE LAUNCH

The masterful nature of *UFO* partly lies in the simplicity of its premise. In terms of how the story of *UFO* is established, the series does nothing that past Supermarionation shows had already toyed with, to the point where it hasn't escaped fans' notice that it's essentially a live-action redressing of *Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons*. Set in the then-futuristic timeline of 1980, the planet Earth is oblivious to a secretive and slow-moving alien invasion of humanoid creatures coming to Earth and robbing human beings of their organs. To combat this cryptic menace, SHADO is formed by the world's governments, an acronym for Supreme Headquarters Alien Defence Organisation. Armed with a fantastic fleet of futuristic vehicles, Moonbases and personnel, SHADO uses all of its might to regularly defend the Earth from a bizarre and unpredictable war of nerves. SHADO's line-up of vehicles is essentially a military version of International Rescue. The sea-faring Skydiver with its Fireball Junior/MEV-esque Sky 1, the ground-based, pod vehicle-styled SHADO Mobiles, Moonbase Interceptors, Lunar Modules, and further classic craft help to reflect the global and cosmic reach of SHADO, designed by Anderson regulars Derek Meddings and Mike Trim.

Armed with this simple premise, the everlasting enjoyment in watching *UFO* isn't a case of what's going on, but rather, *how* it's going on. Throughout



SHADO is Go: The 10 Best Episodes of UFO

UFO's 26-episode run contains some of the greatest episodic science fiction Gerry Anderson and his Century 21 team ever produced. We countdown 10 of UFO's greatest small-screen adventures!

Identified

The first episode of *UFO* establishes its tone and morals in convincing style, as SHADO's first encounter with a UFO leads to the discovery of the aliens targeting and stealing human organs. This leads Straker to presume that the aliens are attacking humanity not out of genuine harm, but simply out of sheer survival for their own existence, highlighting the enlightened nature of *UFO*. The grey morals of SHADO's fascist undertones and the alien's desperation to live are emphasised right from the off.



Exposed

The fascist nature of SHADO didn't go unnoticed by Ed Bishop, who once commented in his *Starlog* interview how SHADO were "answerable to practically no one". *Exposed* encapsulates SHADO's vice-like grip on the world they protect well, introducing series regular Captain Paul Foster, played by Michael Billington. The former test pilot is accidentally caught in the crossfire of a UFO attack, encouraging him to embark on an undercover mission to prove SHADO's existence, who in turn go to great lengths to deter his efforts, all with a final twist that shows how sadistic SHADO can be in their mission.



Sub-Smash

Quoted by Bishop as his favourite episode of UFO, *Sub-Smash* is a fine example of UFO's core theme of how humanity deals with the consequences of a destructive alien force invading Earth. One of two episodes written by *Stingray/Fireball XL5/ Thunderbirds* regular and *TV21* editor Alan Fennell, *Sub-Smash* sees Straker and a Skydiver crew trapped in their damaged craft in the depths of the oceans after an alien attack and their desperate attempts to evacuate the craft, one by one. A superbly claustrophobic affair with engaging performances from its cast.



A Question of Priorities

No other episode perfectly captures the human drama of *UFO* than this one. *A Question of Priorities* perfectly balances the tragedy of Straker losing his son and becoming even more estranged from his ex-wife with an intimate, spine-tingling UFO invasion in the Irish countryside in the dead of night. The episode caused a minor uproar when Gerry was accused by ITC President Abe Mandell of shifting from sci-fi to soap opera. Torn between defending the Earth and being there for his dying son, *A Question of Priorities* captures *UFO* at its most mature and heart-breaking.



Destruction

A complex yet tightly-plotted adventure that's more spy-fi than sci-fi. The aliens launch an elaborate attack on the British Navy, who are carrying out a secretive operation that they refuse to tell SHADO about. Sending Colonel Foster undercover to learn more, it's eventually discovered that the aliens have





penetrated SHADO's detection systems to safely pass through Earth's atmosphere. A desperate race against the clock ensues as Straker demands the navy to tell him of their secret mission before the aliens can carry out their final threat.

Timelash

A later-day gem from the series and a stand-out adventure from the final handful of episodes infamous for their more outlandish premises, Commander Straker and Colonel Virginia Lake are caught in a deadly trap. Time has been frozen to a millionth of a second, thanks to a deal made between disgruntled SHADO operative Turner and the aliens, resulting in Straker freed from his underground office and thrown into a gun-toting battle of wits alongside Lake against Turner. A thrilling mindbender of an episode.



The Square Triangle

A plot by a cheating wife and her lover to murder the wife's husband is thrown into chaos when an alien breaks into the wife's house, resulting in SHADO to force its hand in the situation. Despite the alien threat quickly dealt with, SHADO are faced with the moral conundrum of how to handle an attempted murder. Should they intervene and stop the murder from happening, or distance themselves to maintain SHADO's strict security? The moral implications of SHADO's purpose are at the heart of this episode.



Survival

One of several moon-based episodes that just about secured the lost second series of *UFO*, a deadly blitzkrieg between a UFO and SHADO Moonbase forces joint survivors Colonel Foster and the alien pilot to join together if either are to survive the harsh landscapes of the Moon. Another episode where the aliens are portrayed in a morally grey area reflects *UFO*'s savvy storytelling well, in how it was in no rush to succumb to lazily portraying the aliens as unredeemable enemies.



The Responsibility Seat

An episode that balances Earth and Moon-based conflicts of interest for Straker and Colonel Alec Freeman, highlighting the consequences both men face when stepping away from their military-esque roles. Straker personally deals with a potential security leak in the form of an attractive female criminal, blossoming into a romantic endeavour, whilst Freeman, left in temporary command of SHADO, is forced to make an impossible choice to stop a runaway Russian space mining vehicle bearing down on Moonbase. *The Responsibility Seat* pushes the idea that Straker and Freeman are trapped in their respective roles in SHADO, unable to escape this seemingly endless war, but confined still further to their respective roles.



Confetti Check A-O.K.

A sequel of sorts to *A Question of Priorities*, a SHADO personnel's announcement of their forthcoming child causes Ed to experience flashbacks to his harmonious life prior to the foundation of SHADO, along with its gradual disintegration when the complicated construction of SHADO causes his wife to leave him. An intriguing episode that prizes open just how and why SHADO was created, underscored by the drama of Ed's life slowly crumbling away from him.



the 26 episodes that make up the series, *UFO* routinely took advantage to explore the human fallout of a single military outfit forced with the impossible task of fighting a war they can't predict. It's not enough for these aliens to simply send their craft into Earth's atmosphere on a path of destruction – mind control and blackmail are utilised too, while the consequences triggered by the alien attacks causes human friendships and romances to be scuppered in equal measure. This logic helps to contextualise one of the more lacking elements of the series, which is how we never really learn much of the alien race themselves who choose Earth as their planet to discreetly invade and harvest the biological make-up of humanity. They have no title, no distinction, no genuine identity. While it's understandably frustrating that we come away from the series no wiser as to the alien's origin, the emphasis on the human side of things is evident that this was a creative choice on Gerry and Sylvia's part (along with Reg Hill) to focus on the difficulties faced by SHADO in fighting this war, along with script editor Tony Barwick, a regular collaborator since *Thunderbirds* having served that role on *Captain Scarlet*, *Joe 90*, and *The Secret Service*.

At the centre of this maelstrom is Commander Ed Straker, the leader of







SHADO. With a smouldering performance from Ed Bishop (who'd previously lent his vocal talents for Captain Blue), Straker's relentless yet weary determination to lead his organisation to victory in saving humanity is given palpable impact by Bishop's delivery. The human tragedy of *UFO* is crystallised within this character, with numerous episodes dedicated to showing how his commitment to SHADO leads to the breakdown of his former life. Episodes *Confetti Check A-O.K.* and *A Question of Priorities* show him to be a former family man in his previous role in the US air force, yet the exhausting formation and demanding duties of SHADO tears his marriage down, culminating in the accidental death of his son. Bishop's performance is an undisputable high-point of *UFO*.

Unintentionally enhancing Ed's position as the main character of the show is the revolving door of supporting characters, brought on by actors either leaving the series during its making or the temporary shut-down of production during the series' run. The making of *UFO* initially spanned from April 1969 to the year's end at MGM-British Studios. A five-month wait was endured when the studio closed down, during which time series regulars George Sewell (Colonel Alec Freeman) and Gabrielle Drake (Lt. Gay Ellis) no longer became available. During this downtime, the show underwent a tonal change. Episodes were now flourishing into much wilder scenarios, embracing a much stronger sci-fi ambition, which Bishop would later recall in a 1982 interview with *Starlog* as an improvement of the series. "*The acting, the dialogue, the cutting were all a lot quicker,*" he recalls, "*and the storylines much stronger*". The later days of *UFO* gave us such gems as *Mindbender*, *Timelash*, *The Long Sleep*, and *Reflections in the Water*. Themes of time manipulation, living bombs, and drug-taking populated these episodes, making *UFO* go out in a blaze of manic glory while still maintaining its sombre attitude.

REFLECTIONS IN THE SERIES

With Gerry Anderson's thematic vision and Sylvia Anderson's sharp, vibrant eye for appealing visuals in production design, *UFO* fired, mostly, on all cylinders. Not every episode is a classic, not every character is memorable and not every plot point is fully explored, but *UFO* is unshakeable in being one of the best things Gerry Anderson ever did. Speaking to this very magazine in 1979, Gerry commented fondly on the series, describing it as "*ahead of its time*". Pre-production on a proposed second series, tentatively titled *UFO: 1999*, were scuppered when the show's ratings dipped in America, forcing Gerry and his team to transform their efforts into an entirely new affair, resulting in *Space: 1999*.

There's something bittersweet in how the final work from Century 21 Productions was the kind of TV series Gerry had harboured a long-gestating desire to make throughout his initial Supermarionation career. For all of Gerry's and Century 21's efforts, *UFO* didn't initially meet with much fanfare. Gerry recalled in his 2002 biography how critics didn't entirely slate the series, but clearly had trouble accepting this new, live-action venture from a producer so tied to his puppet roots. Broadcasters were equally perplexed by this more adult offering from an enterprise famed for their marionettes, resulting in *UFO* being thrown around different timeslots in a cursed effort to find a suitable audience. The passage of time has managed to cement that audience for *UFO*, albeit to primarily a cult status. From the thrilling practical effects to the morose stories, *UFO* remains one of the strangest and most compelling sci-fi sagas Gerry Anderson ever made.

Gerry Anderson's UFO is available on DVD and Blu-ray.





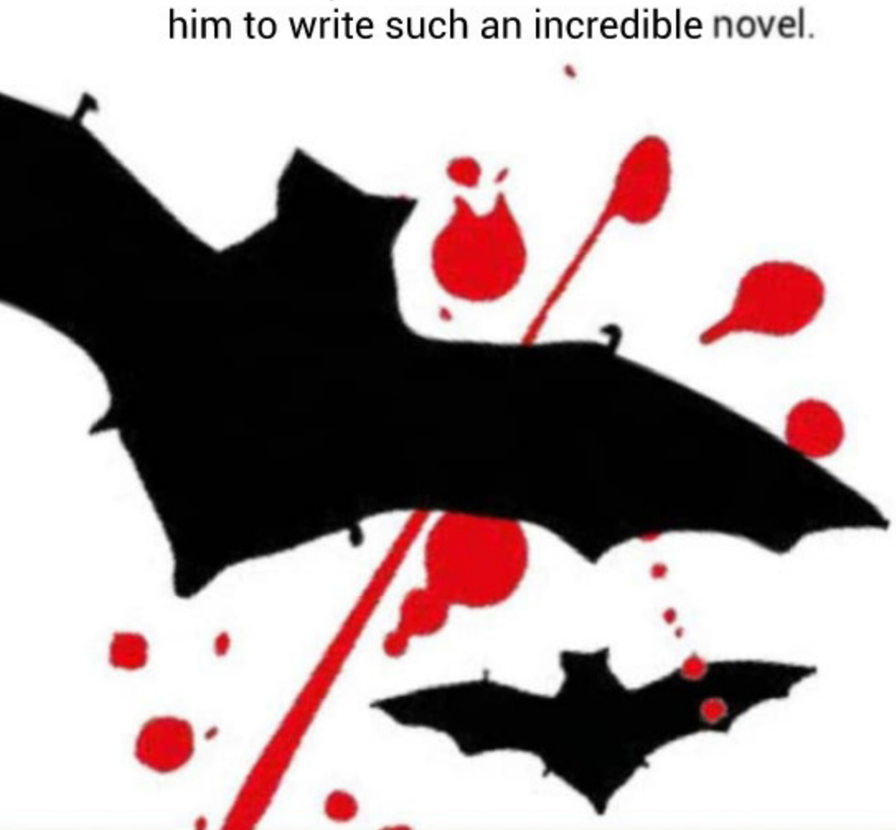


THE BLOOD IS

Arguably the most famous horror thriller of all time is BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA. While Stoker himself passed away in 1912, his cultural legacy lives on, with his literary estate curated by his great-grandnephew, writer, historian, and lecturer DACRE STOKER. Vampires have been a never-ending fascination of humanity throughout the ages, from the Egyptian goddess Sakhmet to Vlad Tepes to Edward Cullen. We were privileged to recently check in with Dacre to talk about his work surrounding the legendary author…

STARBURST: What made you want to honour Bram Stoker's legacy professionally?

Dacre Stoker: It started off being very simple really, I just wanted to learn more about my ancestors, in particular my great-grandfather, Dr. George Stoker, Bram's youngest brother. The more I dug into my family's interesting past, the more I found about the close relationship between Bram and George. I found correspondence between the two, which, in turn, led to more interesting finds about both of them. As a teacher and an athletics coach, I have always been very interested in what makes a person 'tick'. I was obviously aware of Bram's writing and the worldwide interest in his novel *Dracula*. I have become fascinated in both what kind of a person he was and what led him to write such an incredible novel.



You have written both an official sequel and an official prequel to *Dracula*. Do you try to emulate Bram Stoker's style, or do you strike for something different?

My goal is to simply contribute to my great-granduncle's legacy through my writing, both fictional and non-fiction, and through giving lectures to interested audiences. Many people around the world are familiar with the *Dracula* story, but I have found that there are far less who are familiar with its author, his life, and his research and writing of his best-known novel. In writing *Dracul* with J.D. Barker, we decided to write in the epistolary style, like Bram did when developing the novel. It was challenging for us, but we realised that many fans of *Dracula* appreciated our efforts.

You give numerous tours of the Romania of Vlad Tepes. Do you have a favourite site, or some lesser known tips?

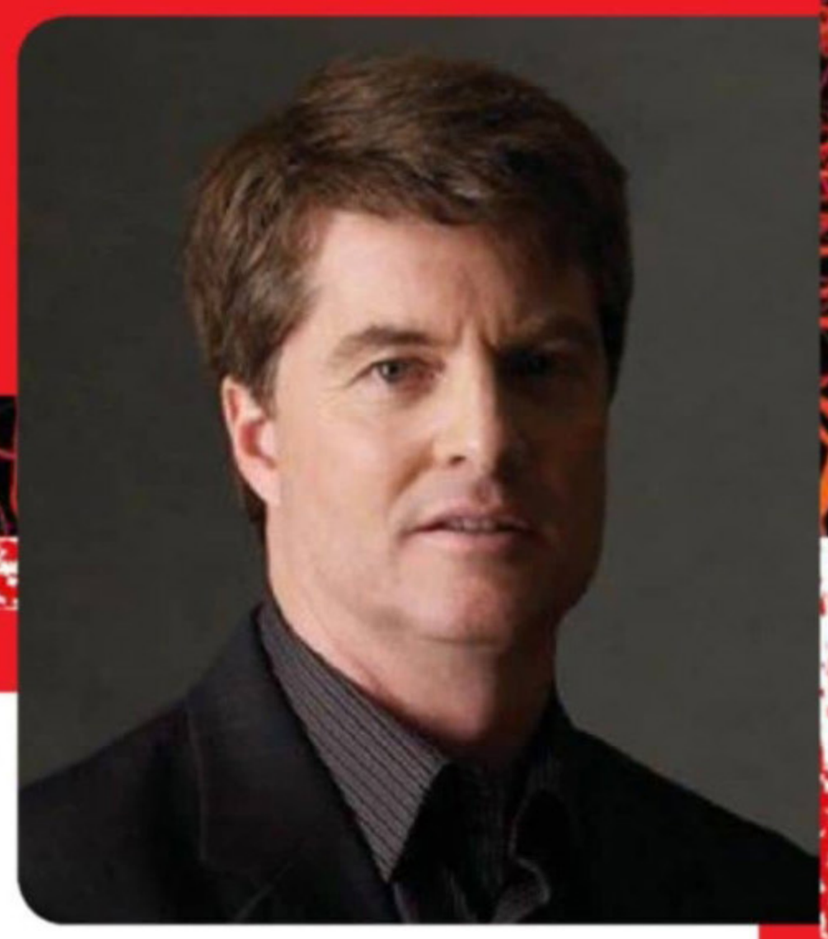
I have led tours for the past five years to locations in Romania associated with both the real Vlad Dracula III, and to sites associated with Bram's fictional Count Dracula. While the castles, palaces, and fortresses are interesting, my favourite location is the Saxon village of Viscri with its beautifully restored fortified church dating back to 1100. Although there is no proof that Vlad the Impaler visited Viscri, and there is no action in the novel *Dracula* set in this quaint little village, Viscri epitomises the romance of rural Transylvania and allows one's imagination to bring you back to earlier times of Vlad Dracula. I have recently started to visit and have plans to lead tours to Cruden Bay; this is the quaint village in northern Scotland where Bram spent at least thirteen of his summer holidays. Local researcher and author Mike Shepherd has found evidence of the different houses and the hotel where Bram and his family stayed over the years. Mike, in his book *When Brave Men Shudder*, has pointed out that Bram wrote parts of *Dracula* here as well as two other novels actually set in this area. I am convinced that Slains Castle, a ruin on the outskirts of town, provided Bram with an interior layout that he needed for describing Castle Dracula. You see, Slains contains a unique octagonal room precisely like the one Bram describes in Chapter 2.

There is endless rich history behind both Vlad Tepes and the mythology of vampires. You tend to do a lot of history-based work in addition to your literary work. Are there any specific tales or peculiar historic facts that you would like to share?

I continue to be fascinated with analysing the myth of the vampire in many different cultures. Many of them seem to stem from the lack

THE LIFE

Words: Alec Frazier

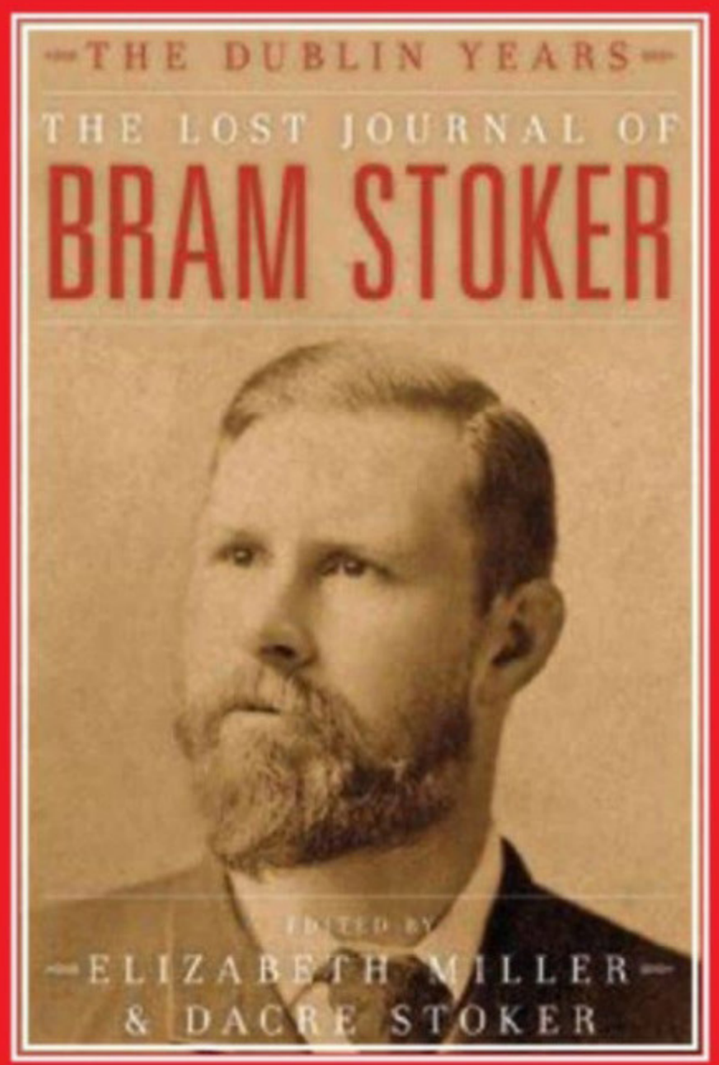


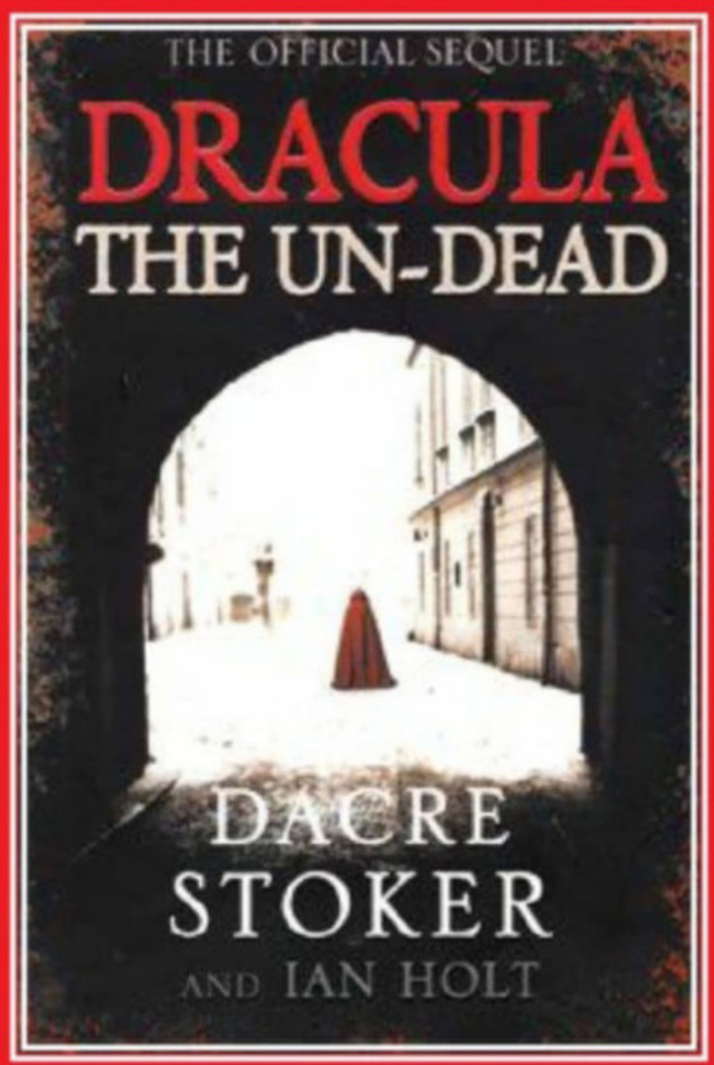
of understanding of biological decomposition, as well as that of germ theory and the contagious aspects of diseases like cholera, plague, and tuberculosis. I am always looking for any 'strange but true' reports or accounts in old newspapers. When I do research for a story, in this age where many newspapers are digitised, it is fairly easy to find real accounts of events happening during the period that my story is taking place, thus I can insert these events to make the story seem more believable.

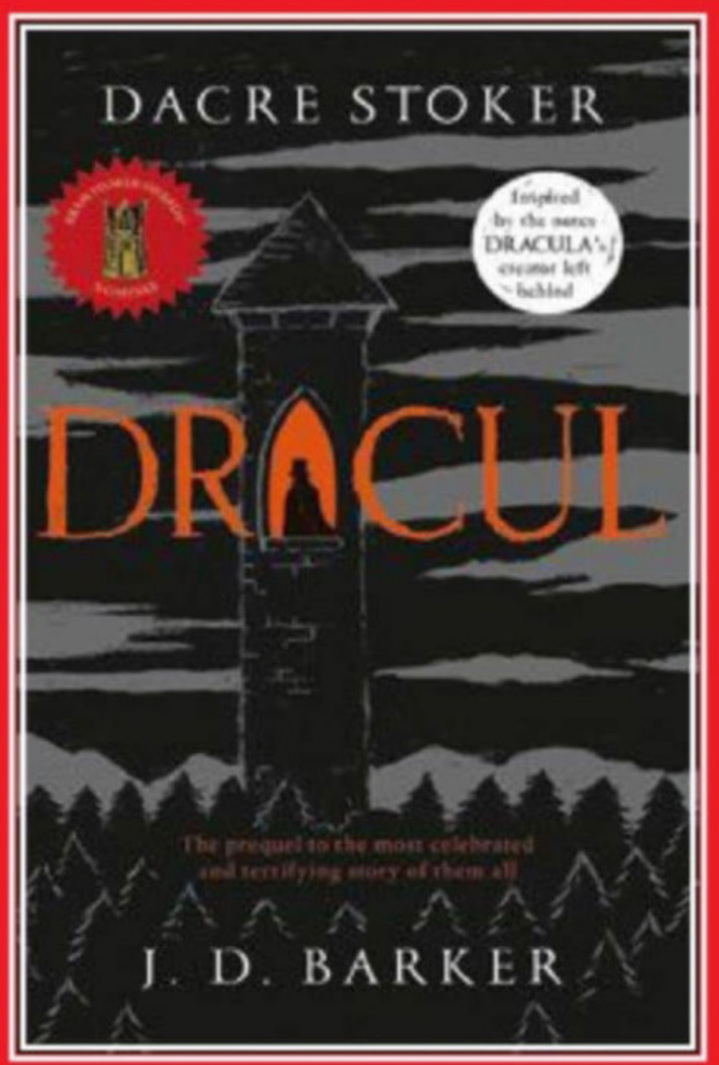
Your great-granduncle was heavily involved in the theatre scene. So much so that writing novels seems almost an afterthought of his. What do you believe that the performing arts have to teach us about culture, literature, and the arts in general?

Bram's writing was a sideline to his primary career as Manager of the Lyceum Theatre in London for twenty-seven years. It appears that he was only able to find the time to research and write his stories and novels when he was on holiday. I can imagine he probably also found the time to write when he was crossing the Atlantic at least sixteen times to travel back and forth to America with the Lyceum actors. Bram was a lover of the Arts; as a college student, he wrote theatrical reviews in a Dublin newspaper, this is what led him to a meeting with Henry Irving, the actor, and the dream job offer to move to London to Manage the Lyceum Theatre. Bram won a prize from the Royal Hibernian Society as a young boy for drawing, and later he became a founding member of the Dublin Painting and Sketching Club. Bram gravitated towards the freedom of expression found in the fantasy world of theatre and at the same time that same trade teaches the discipline associated with portrayal of plays, memorising scripts, attention to dialects, accuracy of costumes and set designs.

The world of vampires has grown significantly since Bram wrote his book. There are endless games, books, movies, TV shows, and everything else. With this, we have seen a seemingly infinite number of changes to vampire lore. Vampires in *Twilight*, for example, are vastly different than Dracula,









"MANY TIMES, THE MYTH OF THE VAMPIRE IN DIFFERENT CULTURES SEEMS TO STEM FROM THE LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONTAGIOUS ASPECTS OF DISEASES LIKE CHOLERA, PLAGUE, AND TUBERCULOSIS."

but both have legions of dedicated followers. What is your opinion on the wide variation in depictions of vampires up to this point?

Obviously, vampires in literature have changed a lot since Bram Stoker introduced Count Dracula back in 1897. Bram's Count was a very dark figure, very animalistic in nature; it needed a complete makeover when he hit the stage as Bela Lugosi in the early 1920s. Slowly, over the years, the name stayed the same, but Count Dracula became more human-like and sexier in his demeanor. Over the course of the next fifty years, creative writers such as Richard Matheson, Anne Rice, Stephen King, Charlaine Harris, Kim Newman, and Chelsea Quinn Yarborough, just to name a few, each adapted their vampires to become unique and possess more human-like qualities. What started as a revenant-like creature from the grave slowly morphed into eastern European debonair aristocrats, before the undead more recently started appearing like the boy or girl next door. Personally, I think it is wonderful that so many authors have been inspired by Bram's novel and I recognise that variation and originality is necessary to keep the readers coming back for more.

Can you tell us about your keynote presentation, *Stoker on Stoker*?

I've been doing *Stoker on Stoker: The Mysteries Behind the Writing of Dracula* for the past five years. My talks provide an audiovisual glimpse behind the scenes of the life and the writing of one of the least known authors of one of the world's most famous books. I weave together details of *Dracula*'s history with Stoker family lore, and Bram Stoker's life in Dublin and London. I've been fortunate to obtain seldom-seen historic images associated with Bram's research and writing process. Recently, I have added some of the background research and images of locations in the novel *Dracul*, co-authored with J.D. Barker.

Bram was, among many other things, an Irishman working in London at a time when there was often contempt towards the Irish. Vampires have, continuously, been depicted as the ultimate outsiders. What do you think that vampires can teach us about acceptance and diversity?

Being more accepting of vampires is not a good example of building tolerance for others who are different from us or are from different cultures. A vampire is a supernatural creature who simply wants to take your life; therefore, it would make good sense to protect yourself and keep your distance. On a more serious note, Bram did experience what is what like to be an outsider from Dublin, Ireland, living and working in London, England for twenty-seven years. I believe that Bram was also very aware of the tensions and confrontations associated with religious differences between Protestants and Catholics growing up in Ireland.

On a related note, there are endless disabled creators looking to get into the professional scene. Disabled actors, writers, set designers, puppeteers, you name it! As a veteran creator, what is your advice for those with disabilities looking to get a leg-up in the creative world?

Bram dealt with some version of a disability himself for the first seven years of his life. It is not known exactly what led to his sickly childhood and to what degree he was affected, but he did recover to become a champion athlete at Trinity College in Dublin. Nowadays, as a result of increased awareness and appropriate laws, many parts of the world have become more accommodating for people with disabilities. My advice is to not hold back, apply yourself, become highly skilled and qualified for your desired roles and do not let your disability become a factor.

Hardcover and paperback copies of DRACULA THE UN-DEAD, DRACUL, and BRAM STOKER'S LOST JOURNAL are available to buy at BRAMSTOKERESTATE.COM, alongside some fun merch such as Bram Stoker Bobblehead figures and the new Vintage Dracula Book Cover necktie. For information about STOKER ON STOKER presentations and tours that Dacre leads to Transylvania, Dublin, Ireland, Whitby, Scotland, and other sites associated with the research and writing of Dracula, visit DACRESTOKER.COM

AT LAST HUMANITY HAS EVOLVED



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ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE EXAMINES THE EVER-EXPANDING PHENOMENON OF TABLE TOP GAMING

THE QUEST IS ON

Let's look at the ever-popular HEROQUEST - its genesis and its future...

It seems like we are always talking about *HeroQuest* in this column, though there's a reason for that. The late-'80s board game served as an (entirely intentional) introduction to fantasy gaming and is responsible for getting a great many people into the hobby, including a good chunk of STARBURST's board-game-bothering readership. It's easy to see why; with its striking swords and sorcery box art, well-produced (for the time) models, and easy, yet engaging, game play, this was a pretty much perfect introduction to both roleplaying games and complex board games. Cheap enough to rival Monopoly and different enough to top Christmas wish-lists, it was a big hit back then.

The fantasy dungeon crawl game was very much a product of its time. UK-based toymaker Milton Bradley worked with Games Workshop to make the game, leaning on GW's knowledge of fantasy tropes and mechanics. Back then, GW was a much smaller company, mostly producing metal models and the odd plastic kit. The high street collaboration was a big deal back in the day. *HeroQuest*, its expansion packs and its sci-fi spin-off *Space Crusade* launched Games Workshop's unique take on genre into the minds of a great many young geeks and made MB a pile of cash. Decades passed. While the fans waited for a re-release, online interest grew with 'print and play' versions of the original game became pretty widespread. The best thing about *HeroQuest* turned out to be its fans, and it still has a hardcore fan base to this day, despite the game being out of print for decades.

Roll on to 2020, and MB is now part of toy making mega-corporation Hasbro. Not one to turn down the opportunity to make money, 2020 has been the year that Hasbro has re-launched *HeroQuest*. Previous attempts to re-launch the game got bogged down in legal issues, but Hasbro isn't short of the time and money to navigate through those. Interestingly, they've used Hasbro's own crowd-funding platform, Haslab, to launch it online. This makes sense; almost all of



"There's a gender-swapped range of heroes exclusive to the crowd funder."



the best-selling dungeon crawl games in the last decade have been Kickstarted. There are two tiers $99 and $149, and given that the more expensive option brings back two of the more famous expansions and load of new models, it's not much of a choice. At the time of writing, the amount of money pledged stands at just under $2 million.

There are some changes, but they aren't as big as you'd expect. For a start, they've shaved off anything that might resemble Games Workshop's '*Warhammer*' IP. The word Chaos has been replaced with the word Dread, for example. So it's dread magic, dread warriors, and so on. Games Workshop's sinister bog monsters, the Fimir have been replaced with aquatic fish-men called 'Abominations'. All the doors and dungeon scenery is plastic and the elf is now female. There's also a gender-swapped range of heroes exclusive to the crowdfunder, which is cool.

The most striking change is the look; it leans much more toward a *World of Warcraft*/animated style fantasy in look and feel rather than the more '80s sweaty and gritty design. The clean look is nice, but those buying this out of nostalgia may be disappointed.

As for Games Workshop? Well, it is going to be very interesting to see how they respond. The company used the success of *HeroQuest* to spin-off their own brand, *Advanced HeroQuest*, which they then renamed *Warhammer Quest*. That label has been used to bring a variety of Warhammer themed dungeon crawlers to market. Their most recent iteration, the sci-fi-themed *BlackStone Fortress*, finished earlier this year. This means there are currently no new *Warhammer Quest* games in GW's roster. Given how salty GW's marketing tends to be these days, we expect to see a response that is both comprehensive and hilarious. And we'll all get a great new game to play, one that will be available everywhere.

What's more interesting is this now means Hasbro can simply keep making *HeroQuest* products. Given the amount of spin-off versions of *Monopoly* there are, how long before we get *The Simpsons HeroQuest*? Or *Stranger Things HeroQuest*? More likely, we are going to get *Magic: The Gathering HeroQuest* and *D&D HeroQuest*. Both fantasy brands are owned by Hasbro and are popular amongst gamers. A *HeroQuest* box featuring Minsc, Boo, and Jaheira is inevitable.

Speaking of spin-off stuff, Wizards of The Coast is continuing to promote *Magic: The Gathering*'s Planeswalkers as the face of the game. Wizkids is producing a full-sized foam version of fire-raising hero Chandra Nalaar. For those with more modest budgets, they are also making plush versions of Garruk, Chandra, Ajani, and Nicol. Or to put it another way, cute cuddly barbarians, steampunks, lion people, and a dragon. They're very cute.

They've not done the same thing with *Dungeons & Dragons* (yet), but they have released an entire set of *D&D*-themed clothes and furnishings. That's right, thanks to Zavvi, not only will they be the exclusive stockist of *HeroQuest*, but if you ever wanted the world to know that you're a huge geek, then they have your back!

Bearing all that in mind, it's highly likely that over the next few years we're also going to get flooded with not just *HeroQuest* spin-off games, but lots of spin-off merch too! The adventure continues, I guess.

Ed Fortune is currently GM-ing an Actual Play Podcast Star Wars podcast Force Majeure, download it today. He's running a lot of D&D right now, mostly through Zoom and D&D Beyond. You can contact him via Twitter on @ed_fortune or via ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com









INDEPENDENTS DAY

FC RABBATH

by PAUL MOUNT

Born in Alexandra, Egypt in October 1986, director/writer FRED 'FC' RABBATH has been an inventor, author, comedian, journalist, and all-around entrepreneur. He's also hugely well-travelled thanks to his father's work, which required Fred to live in several countries before he was even 16. Tirelessly prolific, he has written and directed a string of acclaimed short films and a number of features including Scarlet's Witch (2014), The Hum (2015), The Movie Extra (2015), and especially A Brilliant Monster (2018), which we described as 'quirky and highly watchable... a psychological horror/thriller that examines the nature of creativity and the obsessions which drive the creative mind' He's back later this year with THE WAITING, a highly unusual and unpredictable ghost story that turns slowly into an unusual romantic fable. We spoke to Fred about his background and his approach to his work in the independent movie sector.



STARBURST: How did your itinerant childhood affect you growing up and what impact did it have on the sort of films you both enjoyed and wanted to make?

FC Rabbath: I was lucky to explore new cultures and perspectives. It helped shape me and tell me that everyone has a story, even the bad guys. I loved seeing international films because it also showed new ways stories can be interpreted.

Is there a film that has most influenced you?

Signs, by M. Night Shyamalan really affected me - the way he gave you a movie about aliens but, in reality, it was a movie about something else and that was really eye-opening to me. I loved how he mixed comedy and horror. The balance was unique and I enjoyed his style.

What motivates you as a filmmaker and what influences the types of stories you tell?

I have a desire to find balance and the perfect story. What makes a good story? We know the rules, we know that the lead must be somewhat likeable. However, is there another way? This is my goal, to completely change the hero's journey formula without going too much off the path and risk losing the mainstream audience. I'm tired of being able to predict every movie.

Do you feel that working in the 'indie' sector gives you a greater creative freedom in terms of the stories you can tell and how you tell them?

Yes and no. I wish we had more money to work with. *The Waiting* had a laughable budget. I would like to find the middle ground. I am a Libra, after all. I basically reverse engineer films. I see what I have and write to it. There is no other way, in my opinion, without it looking fake. For example, filming a hospital scene inside someone's house. It's not going to fly. So write to what you have.

What's your approach to your work when you're on set? Are you 'an actor's director' or are you more focused on the visual look of the film?

Yes, I've been called that. I like to rehearse scenes right before and give the actors the freedom to change lines and locations, to an extent, for it to feel more real. It's a collaboration in the end. One must be able to be both an actor's director and a visual director. It's a unique job that most people think you can get away with doing just one or the other.

Can you tell us something about the genesis of *The Waiting* - was it a conscious decision to do something a little more supernatural?

I've experienced a long-distance relationship. They are terrible because of the 'waiting'. You feel like everything is on pause until they come back into your life, and that feeling seemed horrific. So I wanted to make an analogy of that and how great it felt to finally get reunited and say that the waiting was over.

What was the actual production schedule for *The Waiting*?

It was a solid 17 days of filming. We filmed from October to November, 2019. We filmed in Tallahassee and Wakulla County, Florida. North Florida is a great place for filmmaking and I highly recommend it. It was tight but we were able to pull through despite the ridiculous budget constraints and schedules. If you have no choice, try. Finished is better than perfect, because perfection doesn't exist.

How would you describe *The Waiting* - we would probably describe it as a supernatural love story?

A horromedy: horror, romance, comedy. I love mixing genres and mixing those were especially fun, but risky. I'm just glad we were able to pull it off without it looking unnatural.

What impact has the coronavirus pandemic had on your workload and your approach to your work going forward? Do you think the low budget indie filmmaker will suffer or thrive as the industry slowly starts to pick itself up?

Luckily, this was filmed in the end of 2019. I can't imagine filming in a pandemic. It's hard enough when everything is fine. I'm very concerned about how it will affect festivals as you can't really stream the event. It loses its purpose of networking.

Would you relish the opportunity to handle a big budget studio movie or are you happier working in the indie sector?

Of course! I would love the chance to work with a big budget. I often get jealous of their resources. I have a lot of ideas that I simply can't get away with so I'm keeping them on the side just in case. Indie films are special because they're allowed to take risks as not much money is involved. With big budgets you can be original, but it has to fit in the mainstream plate they're comfortable with.

Do you have your own 'dream project' - a story you would really love to tell?

Oh yes, I have a film entitled *Light of Eden* that I am waiting to make. I just need a few million. Do you know someone?

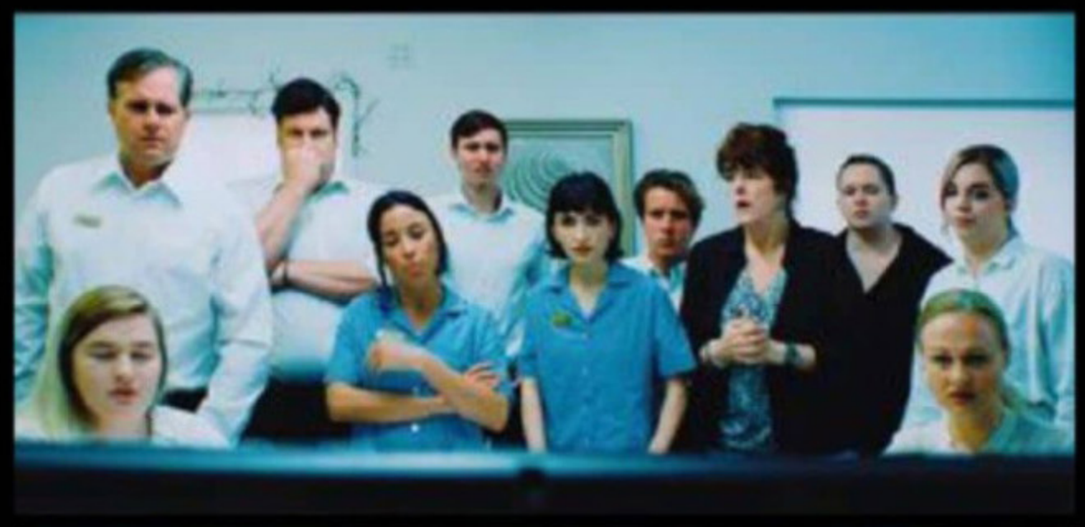
What advice would you give to ambitious directors just starting out and working with smaller budgets?

Don't do it. Did this discourage you? Then don't do it, really. Be prepared to be denied, laughed at, and treated poorly by locations and pretty much anyone you ask a favour of. Money gives you control, and you have none. Pick your battles and don't sweat the small stuff. If your story is worth telling, then make it happen. Don't just make a movie to make a movie. Make something you haven't seen but want to see.

What can we expect from you in the future? Do you intend to stay working in the genre or do you have a traditional romcom or action thriller in you?

I have two projects coming up. *Mr. Calculator* and *Echo Trap*. However, they will most likely be delayed due to the virus. We will try to find a way, but you never know. Safety comes first, always.

THE WAITING is expected to be released in the US in December.









THE UNGODLY

PAGANISM IN FILM & TV

STARBURST explores the cultural impact and varying depictions of the often misunderstood religious movement...

HALLOWEEN goes hand-in-hand with a historic pagan festival known as Samhuinn, traditionally marking the transition from summer to winter. Celebrations of Samhuinn occur all over the UK, but some of the most spectacular are held in Edinburgh by the Beltane Fire Society atop Calton Hill. If you ever visit around that time, expect to see some incredible costumes and an abundance of fire lighting up the night sky, accompanied by intermittent chanting and - somewhere underneath it all - a story to be told...

Samhuinn is seen as a liminal moment. It marks a fluidity of states and offers a greater chance to cross the boundary between our world and the Otherworld (as it is so called in Celtic mythology). Sounds spooky, right? Or at the very least intriguing. And it is this intrigue that has fuelled the inclusion of paganism in many classic works of film and television.

But what do we mean when we say paganism? The term is often conflated, lumped together with a variety of other things such as witchcraft or Satanism - neither of which aptly describes it. In one corner you have your passionate, beautiful, and powerful women, a far cry from the haggard witches of Shakespeare. These women (and they are overwhelmingly women) will never be seen too far away from a bag of crystals, their spellbook, and maybe a rune or two. In the other corner, you have strong, unruly, and unshaven men who fight for honour and have tattoos sewn into their flesh. These guys (more often than not Vikings or Celtic warriors) are more at home throwing axes and chanting at their enemies than quietly casting spells.

If these sound somewhat simplistic, that is largely the point - paganism is a living thing with many limbs. It is a deeply rooted, polytheistic line of belief with a ritualistic appreciation of the natural world and, often, a spiritual reverence of women. All far too complex for most entertainment execs to bring to the screen whilst accounting for every detail. That's why contemporary representations tend to be simplified. But the earlier depictions that kickstarted the cinematic interest in paganism captured more of its traditional elements; nature, femininity and forms of worship that deviate from the Judeo-Christian norm.

There is no better place to start than with three foundational films in pagan horror, all of which date back to the late '60s and early '70s - *The Blood on Satan's Claw*, *Witchfinder General* and, most famously, *The Wicker Man*. The last of these has survived particularly long thanks to two things; the infamy of the diabolical 2006 remake starring Nicolas Cage ("*not the bees!*"), and how it masterfully pushes against the accepted structures of authority and belief prevalent at the time. Even better, it does so without resorting to gratuitous violence or jump scares. Much like last year's *Midsommar* - justifiably described by some as *The Wicker Man*'s heir apparent - it is the twisting sense of dread, the shock that comes over you slowly but relentlessly, that lets *The Wicker Man* linger in the memory. It is still perhaps the best testimony to paganism's lasting appeal in the movies, an exoticised yet strangely local 'other' that can act as a challenging counter to the everyday life of most people.

"THE WICKER MAN AND MIDSOMMAR ARE OBSCURITIES IN THAT THEY FALL UNDER 'FOLK HORROR,' A MUCH LOVED BUT UNDENIABLY NICHE SUBGENRE."



That being said, both *The Wicker Man* and *Midsommar* are obscurities in that they fall under 'folk horror,' a much-loved but undeniably niche subgenre. When you think of pagan movies, there's a reason why things like *The Craft* come to mind - these kinds of film are the 'popular crowd.' Witchcraft had found its way certainly into the hearts of American audiences courtesy of the '60s sitcom *Bewitched*, which pushed boundaries on the representation of women on TV at the time, but it wasn't until the 1990s that the pagan edge really began to take hold. As with the early days of folk horror, there is an easily identifiable triumvirate of witchy films from this time; *Hocus Pocus*, *The Craft*, and *Practical Magic*.

by JAMES HANTON













"PAGANISM TOOK A NEW TURN ON TV, WITH MIGHTY SUPERNATURAL WOMEN STILL VERY PREVALENT IN SHOWS THAT CASHED IN ON BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER'S POPULARITY, BUT A NEW INTEREST IN BARBAROUS, PAINTED MEN ALSO TOOK HOLD."

There are others of course, but these three hold a particular importance.

It is here that the lines between witchcraft and paganism blur, as all three of these films include many elements from each without drawing out in detail which is which. Even so, for very different reasons all three are classics, and all three have either remakes or sequels now in the works more than twenty years later. *Hocus Pocus* was, for Disney standards, an unmitigated flop - commercially and critically - and lost Disney several millions of dollars. Yet, thanks largely to annual Halloween reruns on TV, it has become a cult favourite. And why wouldn't it? The bizarre costumes, outlandish acting, and sensational sense of fun are a winning combination. Especially for families, no spooky season is complete without a night of frolic on All Hallows' Eve. It is a reminder that just because a film features spellcasting, witchy business and evil doesn't mean it can't be a laugh (it's also worth catching for an early performance by Doug Jones as Winfred's undead old flame).

The Craft is a different beast. It very much went against the grain of teen movies of the time like *Clueless* or *Scream* in the way that it portrayed high school kids. It's darker, more insidious, but in its own way ever so delightful. It celebrated the outsider figures that mainstream Hollywood releases refused to endorse, but *The Craft* forced them to sit up and take notice. Progressive, stylish, and endlessly iconic, it became the popular face of witchcraft and pagan practice on screen. This appeal was built on by the unfairly maligned *Practical Magic*, starring the fantastic central pairing of Sandra Bullock and Nicole Kidman as two witchy sisters. Here magic takes on a much more enriching, life-affirming role that nonetheless sees the pair marginalised for their practices. Like *The Craft*, the centralising of female friendship and empowering depiction of romance have stood the test of time, making it far more memorable than many other similarly aimed films of its era. Building on this character archetype also was the US sitcom *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, based on the Archie Comics series. It also used witchcraft as a phenomenon to put women at the heart of the storylines - even if the most memorable character from that show is one particularly mouthy cat...

The young female pagan and witch figure was only assured of its popularity however by Willow in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, beyond doubt one of the most sensational cultural phenomena of the last 30 years. Alyson Hannigan's character may have played almost all seven seasons as second fiddle to the eponymous Buffy, but like the hero of the story stood out as a strong female lead that set the tone on TV for years afterwards. Her ascension from intelligent high school friend to powerful wiccan proved the harbinger for the teenage witch archetype that became a common marker of identity both on screen and among audiences. Willow's unassuming demeanour, style, and dedication to the witchy arts makes her one of the most likeable pagan-leaning characters we've ever had the joy of watching.

Paganism, however, took a new turn on television moving into the new millennium. Mighty supernatural women were still very prevalent in new shows that cashed in on *Buffy*'s popularity, but a new interest in barbarous, painted men also took hold. A catalyst film for this is *Valhalla Rising* - one of Nicolas Winding Refn's earlier works that combines sickening violence and unparalleled style in

the way only he knows how to get right. Mads Mikkelsen is everything you see in modern day shows like *Vikings* or *Norsemen*; a physically strong, unrelenting animal covered in body art - a carnal vision of the hypermasculine ideal. Paganism is commonly aligned with Norse mythology and the impact of the Vikings across Scandinavia and northern Europe, clearly seen in series such as *Knightfall* and an abundance of other, similarly themed shows. Even *The Witcher* incorporates many elements like this, elements that also existed in the original games. Witchcraft exists in these films too, but it often takes a back seat compared to the heavy themes of honour, power, and bashing people's heads in (look to Disney Pixar's *Brave* for a film that can do both). When it comes to men, paganism is aligned with brutal strength.

Yet it is arguably three much more recent films that capture a more accurate, sympathetic view of what being a pagan really means. The earliest of these is 2012's *Celestial Wives of the Meadow Mari*, which screened at the Edinburgh International Film Festival but finding a copy in the UK remains a bit tricky. The film is broken up into 23 vignettes that capture the beliefs, behaviours, and everyday life of the Meadow Mari, an ethnic group living in central Russia widely seen as the last of Europe's authentic pagans. Director Aleksei Fedorchenko celebrates the Mari's ritualistic appreciation of female beauty and sexuality, which goes hand-in-hand with a reification of nature. The result is an enlightening, often funny, and endlessly fascinating insight into folklore that brings the most enriching elements of Mari Paganism to the forefront of your mind. If you ever manage to see it, this is an utterly wonderful thing to experience. The second is *The Love Witch*, a film much easier to acquire. Anna Biller's fantastical story of romance, laughter, and tragedy is like a technicolour fairy tale. There is an unavoidable feminist drive behind the film's story, one that gives *The Love Witch* purpose and often a wicked sense of humour. One of the funniest moments is watching two men scrutinise a used tampon in a jar as if it is some kind of voodoo relic designed to bring about their demise. *The Love Witch* surrenders itself to everything that makes paganism and the occult so inviting, but at the same time manages to make you seriously question whether Elaine (the main character, a phenomenal Samantha Robinson) is in the right. Like *The Wicker Man*, shock and thoughtfulness are the order of the day rather than unbridled judgement. Told with a gorgeous style and an utmost respect for pagan arts, this is a blissful yet piercingly satirical gem of a movie

Finally, there is the aforementioned *Midsommar*, Ari Aster's magnum opus that, depending who you ask, is an utter masterpiece or an indulgent, overcomplicated mess. A return to the pagan horror tradition, this two-and-a-half-hour labour of love plays out like the most twisted of feminine revenge fantasies. The nightmare unfolds in the home of a mysterious pagan cult known as the Hårga. Like the Meadow Mari, they celebrate female sexuality and nature (not so keen on old people though. Or bears). Dani's journey in the film is consistently foreshadowed by her relationships with nature and with her male companions on the trip. The Hårga natives meanwhile are eerily inviting, a method to draw people in and indoctrinate them into their way of thinking. It is a hardly flattering depiction of paganism (nor is it strictly accurate - so much so that Swedish critics described the film as a black comedy rather than a horror), but it is the most unavoidable presence of pagan horror in recent cinema. Whatever the reasons, *Midsommar* and its pagan elements will be talked about and studied for many years to come

Clearly there is no one 'true' depiction of paganism, perhaps for the simple reason that no one true paganism exists. It is an evolving faith with many faces and that blends happily with completely separate doctrines. To the outsider it can feel unfathomable and the antithesis to their own way of living, yet this is exactly the source of our often-morbid fascination. Whether it is butch painted men or intelligent teenage witches, paganism on screen is often defined not so much by what it is, but what it does. Pagan films are progressive and push against the embedded power structures of our world, be it resisting constrictive belief systems or celebrating the female body as opposed to demonising it. Paganism in cinema and on television often lends itself to female characters blessed with the depth and humanity that they deserve, and at the same time it has kickstarted an obsession with male barbarism that has fuelled numerous franchises and TV series. This Halloween, you could do much worse than dabbling in a bit of the dark arts... you might find that, actually, it's everyone else that is in the dark.

(The writer would like to thank his witch girlfriend Katie for proofreading this article. Wouldn't want to piss off the old gods with fake news!)









The manic Martin Unsworth takes a look at some demonic movies you should check out...


The Exorcist III

WE'VE GOT SOUL!

In November, Horror Channel will be presenting four shocking possession movies, so we thought we'd take a look at them before they get under your skin.

The Exorcist III (1990)

Ignoring the 1977 follow-up starring Richard Burton (and believe us, you really should), this belated sequel was not only written by the original author, William Peter Blatty, but was also directed by him. Does that make it perfect? Of course not. So much so that he eventually got the chance to go back and re-edit his footage to get something closer to his original vision. That version, *Legion* (the title of the book on which the film is based), is now available on Blu-ray. However, the theatrical cut has more than enough thrills and chills to make it more than worthwhile.

Acting legend George C. Scott plays Lieutenant William Kinderman, the Washington police detective who was involved with the situation that went down in the 1973 film (the character then was played by Lee J. Cobb, who had since passed away). It's now 15 years after Father Damien Karras plunged to his death down those iconic stairs of M Street in an attempt to rid the world of the malevolent evil that had transferred to him from Regan (Linda Blair). However, what we didn't know then was at the exact same time Karras was dying, James Venamun, a murderer nicknamed the Gemini Killer, was being executed in the state prison. The demonic spirit inside Karras managed to switch Venamun's soul into Karras, who rose from the grave, unable to remember anything. He then spent the following years in a padded cell in the state hospital. A place where Lt. Kinderman is investigating a new batch of murders, all bearing the hallmark of the Gemini Killer.

"There's fierce good vs evil, fighting-for-souls action."

The Exorcist III is a wonderful mix of police drama and demonic possession. It also features one of the best jump scares in modern horror movies (see STARBURST #474 for more info!). There's a glorious blend of surreal dream sequences (keep an eye open for Samuel L. Jackson in one of them) and fierce good vs evil, fighting-for-souls action.

Exorcist: The Beginning (2004)

To go back to the origins of the story, blockbuster director Renny Harlin (*Die Hard 2*) takes the reins here (although *Cat People*'s Paul Schrader had shot a lot of footage before Warner Bros fired him) and focuses on the exorcism that Father Merrin refers to in the 1973 film 'that nearly killed him'. Stellan Skarsgård takes on the role that Max von Sydow did so well as a younger version. He is working as an archaeologist for hire in Egypt, having lost his faith during WWII. While on assignment in Kenya, he uncovers a familiar ancient relic in a recently discovered church, which sets off an unholy hell storm of nastiness.

It might have been a film too much for some people, but there's enough in this prequel to enjoy and Skarsgård is superb as Merrin. It's great to have the chance to see him do more exciting things than he does in the first film.

Deliver Us from Evil (2014)

Director Scott Derrickson had previous experience with demonic movies with both *Hellraiser: Inferno* (2000) and *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005) to his name prior to his breakthrough with *Sinister* (2012). *Deliver Us from Evil* was sandwiched between the massive 2012 hit and Scott's mainstream monster, *Doctor Strange* (2016). Expectations were high for this one, and on the whole, Derrickson doesn't disappoint as *Deliver Us from Evil* has more than enough jump scares and manages to paint the screen with claret at a moment's notice, as well as boasting some great production values. Like *The Exorcist III*, this isn't a straight-up possession film, as it mixes police procedural with exorcism thrills. One-time Hulk Eric Bana plays real life cop-turned-paranormal-investigator Ralph Sarchie, who at this time is just a cat-hating, world-weary cop. His job is about to get really strange after the discovery of a dead baby near an alleyway dumpster. From that tragic event, he is sent to deal with a mentally disturbed woman who has just thrown her child in the crevice in front of the lion's enclosure at the NY zoo. It's



Exorcist: The Beginning



Exorcist: The Beginning



Deliver Us from Evil



The Heretics

HORROR OBSCURA

while there Sarchie sees a seemingly innocuous guy painting over some graffiti. This man, Santino (played by the eerily brilliant Sean Harris, who was amazing in the creepy 2018 indie hit *Possum*), gets away, but with the help of an unorthodox priest, Mendoza (Édgar Ramírez), Sarchie will start to unravel the mystery and begin to question his atheist worldview.

"More than enough jump scares and manages to paint the screen with claret."

The viewers' nerves are certainly on edge by the time of the final confrontation between good and evil, with Mendoza going full-on exorcist, and Sarchie aiding with the English parts of the text. It's a bloody affair, and visually, the film evokes memories of David Fincher's *Se7en* (1995), while rivalling the action of *The Exorcist III*. The blockbuster sheen of the film should come as no surprise since Jerry Bruckheimer was on board as a producer.

The Heretics (2017)

This film opens with a woman, Gloria (Nina Kiri), who has been kidnapped and tied to an altar. Surrounded by masked group who simultaneously slit their throats in a sacrificial ceremony for the locust moon. Gloria awakes amid the bloody carnage, dazed but happy to be alive. With the help of therapy and her new love, Joan (Jorja Cadence), she attempts to get her life back together. That is until Thomas (Ry Barrett) appears on the scene and kidnaps her again. He had been at the ceremony years earlier but faked his suicide. Now the locust moon is approaching again and the seed that was planted earlier will come to fruition - literally. Gloria has a demon inside her that will transform her into the Lord of Locusts, Abaddon. You can imagine this demon doesn't have good plans for the world. But who is going to be Gloria's saviour?

Directed by Chad Archibald, whose *I'll Take Your Dead* was a festival hit last year, *The Heretics* is a visually powerful movie. As Gloria begins to transform into the malevolent fiend that has been gestating inside her, there are plenty of wince-inducing effects and even a bizarre, sickening love scene. Jayme Laforest's screenplay (from Archibald's original story) is bright and engaging, and provides a few twists and enough intrigue to keep everything interesting.

You can catch the POSSESSED season every Saturday throughout November on HORROR CHANNEL. Sky 317, Virgin 149, Freeview 68, Freesat 138.

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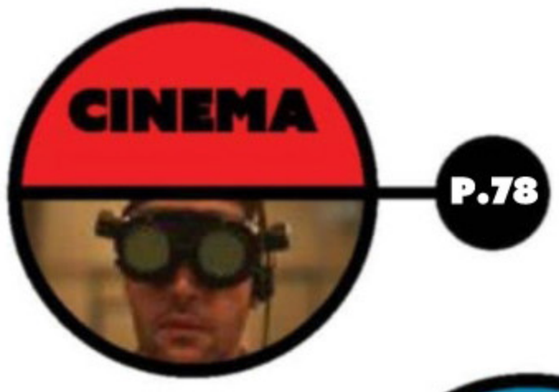
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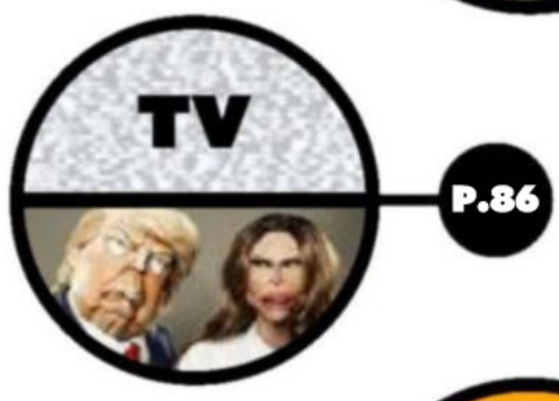

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POSSESSOR

18 • RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 27TH

Brandon Cronenberg's sophomore feature asserts him both as a distinct creative voice and as a part of the great horror tradition laid out by his father, David Cronenberg. This ambitious arthouse horror is an ultra-stylish, ultra-violent exploration of selfhood and identity guaranteed to crawl under your skin... and perhaps nest there.

In an alternative 2008, a woman named Tasya Vos (Andrea Riseborough) works as a contract killer, inserting herself into the minds of 'hosts' and using their bodies to carry out executions. Once the job is done, the host kills themselves while her consciousness slips back into her body, tucked away in a secret facility. Though it's clear the work is taking its toll on Vos, she is nonetheless quickly pushed into another assignment – one which will devolve into a brutal fight for control, with the body of Colin Tate (Christopher Abbott) serving as battleground.

What ensues is a visually glorious struggle with, and for, one's selfhood. Where Possessor's strength lies in its spectacle and lofty ambitions, those same virtues also make it relatively low stakes. The protagonists are so thinly sketched that the battle between identities feels inconsequential. However, this also allows Cronenberg to pose questions about the meaning of identity and its mutability without having to provide answers or resolution. It can be frustrating, but it pushes the audience to come to their own conclusions. In any case, Possessor's visceral violence and vibrant body horror create so great and unsettling a visual impact that its echoes will continue long after the screen goes dark. Possessor forces its audience to ponder the meaning of the self, and perhaps re-evaluate its very existence.

LAURA POTIER





RELIC

15 • RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 30TH

For all the monsters and masked axe-wielders horror cinema creates, the most frightening things of all are inevitable truths. Director Natalie Erika James' Australian feature sees such truths play out in the most haunting and affecting way imaginable, in a sensational debut that has the enveloping feel of Hereditary, but is more like The Taking of Deborah Logan meets The Babadook by way of Cronenberg.

Relic sees Kay (Emily Mortimer) and her daughter Sam (Bella Heathcote) alerted that their mother and grandmother respectively, Edna (Robyn Nevin), has not been seen by the neighbours in a few days. As they arrive to investigate, they find the house in a messy state, but when Edna mysteriously returns days later, signs increase that all is not well.

Despite the aforementioned comparisons, you'll still be unprepared for what Relic truly is. An original story, which is chilling, sustained, and confined, as the screenplay harnesses its terror from the cruel reality of watching those we love wither away before us, losing all that they are and were. This overpoweringly shadowy film conjures some unsettling imagery, as Brian Reitzell's sometimes Guðnadóttir-esque score builds, with Relic's central 'monster' really being a metaphor for the affliction of degenerative conditions and the pain in their wake.

Mortimer is fantastic as the daughter facing her mother's loss, just as Heathcote is as she witnesses her family crumbling, while Nevin captures the feral and helpless sides of such suffering. Relic is a tormentingly emotional experience but come the gruesomely unexpected, unusual, and shattering conclusion, you're left reeling by an ending that will stay with you long after and perhaps forever more.

JACK BOTTOMLEY





SHIRLEY

15 • RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 30TH

Shirley is an unsettling, decidedly unconventional biopic of famed horror and mystery author Shirley Jackson. Madeline director Josephine Decker is less concerned with historical retelling than she is with capturing the essence of the American writer, as she goes on blurring the line between fantasy and reality. Based on the novel from Susan Scarf Merrell, Shirley explores an imagined period of Jackson's life when a younger couple moved in with her and her husband Stanley (Michael Stuhlbarg). Jackson (Elisabeth Moss) strikes up a peculiar relationship with the young woman Rose (Odessa Young); at times apathetic, intimate, or abusive, their exchanges might leave your head spinning, but they also work to weave a rich and complicated portrait of the author. Young, in particular, gives a fearless performance as she shifts between personas, taking on the roles of dutiful wife, trusted confidante, lover, rival, and mentee, all the while coaxing out a guarded vulnerability in Shirley.

Decker's film is a strange construction, though appropriately so given its subject and Moss' hypnotic screen presence. At its core, Shirley is about power. Though much of the runtime is spent trapped within the four walls of Shirley's house, the ever-shifting balance of power keeps the story taut and tensions high as characters wrestle for control. It is endlessly uncomfortable, keeping the audience off-kilter through the sheer power of Shirley's central performances and its unpredictable direction. The essences of a psycho-sexual thriller, a feminist drama, and a supernatural horror are effectively blended together to create one fiercely subversive study of Shirley Jackson, with truly fantastic performances from Moss and Young.

LAURA POTIER



WOLFWALKERS

PG • RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The final film in Cartoon Saloon's informal 'Irish folklore trilogy' (which includes The Secret of Kells and Song of the Sea), Wolfwalkers is a spellbinding manifestation of artistic vision, exploring themes of environmentalism, civilisation's relationship with nature, and post-colonial trauma.

Set in 17th-century Kilkenny, it rewrites history at the point of Oliver Cromwell's violent invasion of Ireland and subsequent campaign to 'tame' its people and quash the Catholic Church. Here, the Cromwellian figure of Lord Protector (Simon McBurney) is struggling to maintain control of the town: wolves haunt the woods beyond the city walls, terrorising those within and creating unrest. He has brought Bill Goodfellowe (Sean Bean) from England to hunt down and kill the pack, so that English forces may clear the forest for agricultural use. With him is his daughter Robyn Goodfellowe (Honor Kneapsey), a young girl who, despite her father's protests, wishes to become a wolf-hunter.

In her desire to prove herself, Robyn sneaks out into woods and meets Mabh (Eva Whittaker), one of the last Wolfwalkers – mythic humans who can transform into wolves. The unlikely friendship that blossoms between them gifts Robyn a new perspective on the woods and its inhabitants, and on her place in this world. The breath-taking visuals contribute as much to the storytelling as the action, weaving together Irish identity, art, and folklore to illustrate the dualism between a callously modernising world and nature, brimming with life and beauty. Wolfwalkers is a proud rejection of colonial legacy, an urgent call-to-arms against the continued destruction of our environment, and a truly poignant tale of empathy, understanding and loss.

LAURA POTIER



CATS & DOGS 3: PAWS UNITE!

PG • RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Way back in 2001, Lawrence Guterman's high concept family comedy pitted cats and dogs against each other with a spy thriller spin, in the fun box office hit Cats & Dogs. Nearly 20 years on, however, the franchise feels like it has aged in dog years.

2010's sequel The Revenge of Kitty Galore was poor but sadly Cats & Dogs 3 is a pavement foul of a trilogy closer. Mostly standalone (previous series baddies are mentioned in passing), this movie sees a world where some degree of harmony has been reached between the two species, who work at the agency together to keep the peace. But a new threat rises, promising to have cats and dogs back at each other's throats.

While there's much potential in the concept of secondary pets wanting revenge on cats and dogs for pushing them to the sides of adoption, you know that you are in for a 'ruff' ride when the script makes such a big deal of agency acronyms that spell out F.A.R.T. and P.O.O.P. The animals are cute and the best actual actors in the entire movie, but there is virtually nothing to distinguish this from any other talking animal picture ever made. Just watch the first film instead!

One memorable character emerges in vengeful lizard villain Zeke, but the lack of energy and absence of the original's scene-stealing villain Mr. Tinkles, even in cameo form, only adds further disappointment to a 'sequel' that is more eye-rolling more than it is side-splitting. Still, the animals are absolutely lovely!

JACK BOTTOMLEY



SYNCHRONIC

RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER

15 • a

In New Orleans something strange is happening... Drug users are being found dead from inexplicable causes, from sword wounds to horrifying burns to impossible falls. What could be behind it? Only two curious paramedics may have the answer.

Dennis (Dornan) is a family man with a nearly adult daughter and brand new baby tying him down, while Steve (Mackie - you know, Falcon out of the MCU) is a freewheeling independent hedonist suddenly forced to reconsider life by an unexpected medical diagnosis. While navigating their own complicated lives, the paramedics are presented with the mystery of synchronic, a synthetic drug that seems to have time bending (and fatal) effects on those who use it.

Synchronic is an odd animal. It's easiest described as a buddy cop time travel movie (except replace 'cop' with 'paramedic') and, as such, lives and dies, not on the sci-fi concepts at the heart of it (which are very silly) but on the charisma and chemistry of its buddy leads. Thankfully it has Anthony Mackie who, pretty much on the merits of his charisma alone, carries the entire film, straddling comedy (as he begins to experiment with the effects of Synchronic) and a very believable world weariness and sense of grief as he goes through diagnosis and treatment for a terrifying condition. As mentioned, the reasons for the time travel in Synchronic are genuinely laughable (a scientist turns up at one point to make a metaphor using some vinyl before quickly and permanently disappearing, adding nothing to the believability of the plot), but it does its best to handle the implications with a straight face, particularly that of a black man travelling back to periods in US history where being black would be enough to endanger and render a time traveller powerless on its own. However, the whole time travel bit comes late enough in the film that it has little time to breathe before resolution, which is a shame as Anthony Mackie's adventures through American history is a film series this writer would sign up for watching in a heartbeat.

The chemistry between Dornan and Mackie is certainly good enough to sustain the buddy element of the film, although Dornan's character rapidly begins to feel somewhat superfluous to the plot as events go on, and there is clearly more love between the two of them than any of the female characters they interact with, but it is a film that is suddenly over before it's begun, possibly due to juggling too many plot elements, and, although nicely shot and fairly entertaining it would be very empty fare with Anthony Mackie centring it all.

Roll on 'Anthony Mackie's Adventures through American History'. Two season tickets please.

SPLEENY DOTSON

★★★☆☆





I'M THINKING OF ENDING THINGS

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

15 • NETFLIX

I'm Thinking of Ending Things, based on Iain Reid's novel, concerns a young woman (Jessie Buckley) who is on a road trip with her boyfriend Jake (Jesse Plemons), as they head to meet his parents. Trouble is, she is thinking of ending things.

Charlie Kaufman's latest is both unmistakably a horror film and also not. A perplexing drive into the existential terror of the human condition, with scenes as affecting as they are toe-curling. From its earliest moments, the unease bleeds into the story but it's only as the narrative is ripped to shreds and blown into a - literal - snowstorm, that you're encouraged to try and snatch the pieces, making of them what you will. Some may see such fragmentation as pretentious or needless, but one gets the impression Kaufman wouldn't have it any other way.

Jessie Buckley is remarkable in the passenger seat of the film, her character increasingly isn't in control and her very being constantly fluctuates alongside events. Jesse Plemons' post-Breaking Bad career meanwhile continues to yield great results, and excellent support is offered by a socially awkward David Thewlis and a jittering Toni Collette as Jake's parents. Such darkly comic performances only add to the film's encompassing nature.

I'm Thinking of Ending Things lays bare our feelings and experiences, for a shared discussion and meditation on ageing, regrets, and being tortured by our thoughts, hopes and desires. It toys with horror and thriller tropes in the most aesthetically enchanting and bold of ways, the results are, simply put, human.

JACK BOTTOMLEY



TRAIN TO BUSAN PRESENTS: PENINSULA

RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 30TH

15 • DVD Blu-ray

Four years after Train to Busan, this second sequel (following the animated Seoul Station) strives to do something different with the franchise but flounders under the weight of its underdeveloped characters, concepts, and subplots. The script follows a group of Koreans living in Hong Kong who return to a quarantined, zombie ravished Incheon to retrieve a truck containing $20 million. Naturally, their path is beset with the salivating undead but it's more than just zombies the gang should watch out for.

The plot, led by established protagonist Jung-seok (Don-Wong Gang), splinters into several strands that, when combined, make it muddled and chaotic. Potentially interesting supporting characters are introduced but are not developed enough to lend weight or resonate. A prologue provides context and compels momentarily but emotional/character arcs are sacrificed for synthetic CG laden set-pieces that unravel like glitching screensavers.

The lawless, post-apocalyptic Incheon and its survivors, led by an ex-military dictator-like Sergeant Hwang (Min-Jae Kim), provide the backdrop for a gawkily woven second half, which connects family dramas to the cash stash and a separate rescue mission, not to mention the zombie apocalypse itself which saturates the milieu like a franchise anchor, stunting both character and narrative growth.

Act one amuses along with later rambunctious set-pieces yet Peninsula feels panic-fashioned to be epic and distinct, resounding as a protuberant cash cow drained to enervation. Peninsula adheres to contentious franchise characteristics and tries to do, and be, too much at once. Despite these grand ambitions, this (hopefully) final entry is a superfluous zombie clotted CG kerfuffle and discombobulating VFX smudge that's a sometimes fun but frequently unfocused victim of its own branding.

DANIEL GOODWIN



BLACK WATER: ABYSS

RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 2ND

This belated, spiritual – and entirely unconnected – sequel to 2007's Black Water, in which a ferocious saltwater crocodile terrorised a group of holidaymakers in Northern Australia, is pretty much a case of 'rinse and repeat'. Returning director Andrew Traucki does little more than rearrange the furniture by moving the action into a slowly-flooding underwater cavern to deliver a shamelessly-derivative piece of entertaining by-the-numbers shlock that suggests that it's still not safe to go back into the water, and that movie audiences are unlikely to ever lose their primal fear of sharks, crocodiles, and other assorted big scaly things that live and feed in the water.

We're still in Northern Australia where, this time, a bunch of faceless should-know-betters decide to go spelunking (it's a real thing, look it up) into a cave system to escape an oncoming storm. Naturally, they can't get out again and find themselves trapped as the waters start to rise, bringing with them a prowling, hungry crocodile that proceeds to do what prowling, hungry crocodiles are want to do when foolish humans get up close and personal. Cue much screaming, thrashing about in the water and the occasional fountain of blood as Mr Snappy gets to chow down on his latest fast-food snack.

There's really nothing in Black Water: Abyss that we haven't seen in dozens of these low budget creature features and it certainly doesn't even try to put a new spin on a tired idea as Alexandre Aja managed in last year's tense and nerve-shredding Crawl. The characters are a bland and faceless bunch despite transparent attempts to create some tame relationship tension between them but in truth, we're not here for emotional angst, we're here to watch a big reptile sink its teeth into screaming idiots. In this regard, Black Water: Abyss doesn't disappoint and there's certainly a palpable sense of uneasy dread from the claustrophobic setting – why do people insist on clambering around in cold, dark, dingy caves? – even before the hungry, hungry crocodile starts to circle around looking for a free lunch.

Black Water: Abyss is as good as it needs to be and no more. It does everything we might expect of it and no cliché is left unvisited – just when it looks as if the nightmare is over, there's one further twist of the knife – but you're quite likely to find it an embarrassingly enjoyable experience even as you roll your eyes at its predictability.

PAUL MOUNT





THE SWERVE

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Holly (Azura Skye) is a mother, wife, daughter, sister, and teacher and she appears to be falling apart mentally. Her children ignore her, her husband is distant, her sister is an ex-junkie who relishes in humiliating her at a family dinner, and one of her students is infatuated with her. This is a woman with everything on her plate and is struggling to digest anything. To top it all, she has a mouse in her house that has bitten her. As her world collapses around her, can she trust what she thinks is real?

This is writer/director Dean Kapsalis' first feature and it's an assured, measured, and thoughtful work. Even the moments that could have been overblown for shock value are presented in a rationed fashion, bringing us ever deeper into Holly's crumbling psyche. The character isn't an easy one to get behind, but Azura Skye is fantastic in the role, and the descent of her mental health is handled so well that it's hard not to feel sympathetic to her cause, even if you don't agree with what she's doing. Much of the pacing and claustrophobic framing brings to mind the work of Ingmar Bergman and we're often left questioning the reality we're being shown as Holly's view becomes more tainted by her psychiatric state. Naturally, it all leads to a devastating climax that will leave you reeling.

Although The Swerve isn't a traditional horror film, it is nevertheless deeply disturbing and will resonate with viewers, regardless of gender.

MARTIN UNSWORTH





INHERITENCE

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

15 • NETFLIX

Lauren Monroe is the eldest of two in a wealthy, successful family; she's District Attorney, brother a senator, and Dad... a... banker? Gambler? Rich, anyway. And clearly awful. Anyway, after the Dad's sudden death Lauren inherits his secret, which is that [SPOILER ALERT] Simon Pegg is buried in a bunker at the bottom of the garden. If you can continue a plot from that which only builds in tension and intrigue, then you're a better man than writer Matthew Kennedy and director Vaughn Stein.

Chained and haggard Pegg slowly reveals his identity and background, but with sufficient sense of 'unreliable narrator' for you to wonder what really happened. However, also with sufficient evidence that Lauren's Dad chained him up in the bottom of his garden without due process for you to think "Call the police Lauren! What is wrong with you, you horrible woman!"

Pegg is trying his hardest throughout (and having much more fun towards the end), although his channelling of Jack Nicholson would feel less heavy-handed if he wasn't constantly saying "*You want answers? You want the truth?*". In fact, the whole cast do try, but the dialogue is often quite weak, particularly in the long-awaited Rashomon moment reveal.

Inheritance's central theme seems to be the unearthing of dark secrets beneath the perfect family, but this image is undermined by the fact that even Lauren seems like a stroppy cow, with the rest of the family ranging from shit-eating smug to obnoxious bully, to toxic trophy wife, and the first secret we learn is that THEY'RE KEEPING SIMON PEGG AT THE BOTTOM OF THE GARDEN. Genuinely though, where *could* you go from there?!

SPLEENY DOTSON



SPREE

RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER

15 • a

Desperately seeking to boost his social media presence, a rideshare driver concocts a deadly plan to go viral by murdering as many passengers possible. Rigging his vehicle with multiple cameras for a nonstop livestream of killer entertainment, Kurt Kunkle prepares for what he believes will be the defining moment for his channel. A satirical horror that focuses on the pitfalls of social media, Spree is a hauntingly real pastiche of fame hungry individuals who have grown-up around the sphere of Internet culture.

With a captivating lead performance by Stranger Things' Joe Keery, Spree manages to be an engaging romp from beginning to end. Admittedly, most of the enjoyment comes solely from Keery's portrayal of Kunkle as he's able to perfectly capture the narcissistic traits of a resentful young man and the pathetic nature of his plight into infamy. It's unfortunate, however, that the film basks in a plethora of caricatures and focuses on some of the most vacuous individuals to grace the screen. A subtler approach would have given the film extra depth and could have been truly terrifying, although, it would have admittedly made for a completely different viewing experience.

To give credit where it's due, Spree does a terrific job at accurately capturing the essence of Internet culture. Whether that be in the form of constant abuse in the comments or the manipulative and shallow nature of the individuals who use it, Spree does a good enough job at showing how it ultimately does nobody any good. A film that may appeal more to the younger generation, Spree is well worth a watch just for Keery's powerhouse performance alone.

JONATHAN EDWARDS



THE RENTAL

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

15 • a

It is maybe to be expected that a whole generation of filmmakers that grew up with a particular set of movies at their disposal may well end up reviving that genre. And it looks like the slasher film is slowly but surely - and thankfully - making a comeback, and Dave Franco's directorial debut, The Rental, is a confident and wise entry in the genre, toying as it does with voyeuristic ideas and not knowing who anyone really is.

The film sees Charlie (Dan Stevens) and his girlfriend Michelle (Alison Brie), alongside his brother Josh (Jeremy Allen White) and girlfriend Mila (Sheila Vand) rent a picturesque clifftop home for a weekend getaway. Spoiler: it isn't the fun break they envisioned. Franco and Joe Swanberg's screenplay is a beautifully shot (with Christian Sprenger's atmospheric cinematography) Vacancy-like thriller which drips into a tech-savvy slasher, and Franco's direction allows the drama to initially stem from real life tensions and friction among friends, as 'party night gone wrong' hijinks ensue. Stevens, Vand, Brie, and White are all excellent, and the chaos begins before the premise comes fully into play, with Toby Huss' racially-motivated property owner Taylor and some relationship/trust issues surfacing among this confined group.

Many things play out as the rulebook dictates, but the key to Franco's success, is that he allows it to, keeping the story simple and not needlessly buggering about with audacious shenanigans. Then, refreshingly, he refutes select rules in a finale that realises less is more, reminding to some degree of Adam Mason's chilling Hangman. This ability to know when to hold back makes all the difference.

JACK BOTTOMLEY



ENOLA HOLMES

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

PG • NETFLIX

As we cycle into the mindset of Enola Holmes (Millie Bobby Brown) - with a fourth-wall-breaking effect - we're quickly pulled into this engrossing 1884 tale right from the start. After Enola's mother, Eudoria Holmes (Helena Bonham Carter) mysteriously goes missing, Enola avoids the responsibilities of her legendary brothers Sherlock (Henry Cavill) and Mycroft (Sam Claflin) in an attempt to find her. However, her main mission is abruptly put to the sidelines as she helps Lord Tewkesbury (Louis Partridge) evade a deceiving family conspiracy all of his own.

While the pair outrun the grasps of an old fashioned Terminator-like character, Linthorn (Burn Gorman), we see vicious getaway scuffles take place on a train, along with a clue-finding trek through the hustle, bustle, and politics-filled London. The key aspect to this Holmes excursion is Enola's relationship with Eudoria, and as quick flashbacks of their history make themselves known throughout, you'll get to see how their repertoire has a constant effect on Enola's decisions in the present, as it also dictates her personality progression overall.

Just in case the title doesn't confirm this for you, Enola Holmes is nothing like the recent BBC or Guy Ritchie outputs, and on this occasion, Sherlock and Mycroft are put into supporting (but obviously crucial) roles. Harbouring compelling acting across the board, director Harry Bradbeer has constructed an innovative look at the renowned Holmes family. With a shotgun-blast ending giving way to the remaining secrets, an exciting, yet unknown destiny is laid out for Enola, and it's one which fans would surely want to see.

ANDREW DEX



DEVIL ALL THE TIME

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

18 • NETFLIX

Lodged between World War II and the Vietnam War, The Devil All the Time tells the story of Arvin (Tom Holland) who, while protecting his family from unforgiving forces, is trying to live with a traumatic past. For fans of the book on which this is based, you will be pleased to notice that the narration is performed by none other than the author himself, Donald Ray Pollock.

Disturbingly setting the stage is Arvin's father, Willard (Bill Skarsgård), who is vital when it comes to influencing Arvin's future actions, and protective nature. Maybe most importantly, he proves to Arvin that you can fight your corner, if you pick the right moment. Also doing a terrifying, but precise job at nailing the gruesome tone in its opening segment is a frantic and career changing turn from Harry Melling as the maddening preacher Roy.

Accompanying the main plot are isolated stories that have frightening, corrupt leads obeying their delusional thoughts. From Robert Pattinson, Sebastian Stan, Jason Clarke, and Riley Keough, we dig into the chilling side of their acting portfolios, and it's this effort that makes for satisfying viewing when our hero Arvin is seemingly forced to cross their paths.

Antonio Campos and Paulo Campos have made a shocking, complex film, that behind the curtain describes the intense connection humans can have with religion, and how that belief in a higher being can at times be taken advantage of to cover up evil acts. This is one of the most ruthless, yet gripping Netflix Originals to date.

ANDREW DEX



THE OTHER LAMB

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

18 • Blu-ray DVD a

The shadow of Charles Manson looms ominously over this, the latest feature from Polish director Malgorzata Szumowska. It's evident from the off that something isn't quite right about the all-female community living in the woods. Living under the supervision of a man known only as The Messiah, these women and girls attend to their daily duties while singing the praises of their long-haired and bearded man. Selah (Raffey Cassidy) has never known any different, but even she realises that something might be amiss here. As the Flock goes on the move after being banished by local law enforcement, Selah sets upon the long and difficult road to liberation.

No sleazy exploitation picture this, Szumowska's slow-and-steady coming-of-age tale is a chilly thriller with more in common with the work of Yorgos Lanthimos than Tarantino. Eagle-eyed viewers will notice that the film even shares a lead in actor Raffey Cassidy; magnetic as the conflicted young Selah. What the film lacks in pacing, it makes up for its gorgeous cinematography, making the most of its remote woodland setting and icy colour palette (filmed in Ireland, pretending to be America). Visually, it's The Handmaid's Tale crossed with Shyamalan's The Village. Tonally, it's not far off either.

Viewers expecting the thrills and spills of your traditional horror film about woodland cultists may be disappointed – The Other Lamb is a slow, torturous battle for emancipation. Its story is not especially original and the storytelling is muddled at times, but that doesn't make this film any less powerful. This is provocative, disturbing, and deeply unsettling cinema... and all without a single jump scare or flamethrower in sight.

JOEL HARLEY



TREMORS: SHRIEKER ISLAND

RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 16TH

15 • Blu-ray DVD

Considering their straight-to-video status and their lack of Kevin Bacon, you'd be forgiven for writing off the abundant sequels to 1990 cult hit Tremors. Forgiven until now, that is, because we're telling you that they're well worth the time of anyone who enjoyed the first film.

Much like Inspector Clouseau, who debuted as a supporting role in The Pink Panther before taking centre stage in the sequels, the Tremors movies quickly honed in on Burt Gummer, the oddly loveable, survivalist gun-nut played by Michael Gross in the first film. Gummer is the lead character in all *six* subsequent movies (not to mention appearing in the short-lived TV-series).

The franchise took something of a downward turn after the original creators stopped having any involvement, starting with Tremors 5: Bloodlines. This also marked the introduction of Travis, the estranged son of Gummer, played by Jamie Kennedy. Travis returned for the sixth movie but is noticeably absent here – noticeably because of how blatantly his character has been re-worked into a 'new' character played by Napoleon Dynamite's Jon Heder. Contrived as it all feels, Heder is a welcome upgrade.

In Shrieker Island, humans are no longer the most dangerous game; Graboids are. A wealthy hunter has been shipping them to his private island, but inevitably, things go wrong and Burt is drafted to save the day. Coming from largely the same creative team as the previous two movies, this one features a more confident and playful feel than the franchise has had in a while. While it's far from the best that Tremors has to offer, there's plenty of Graboid action, a handful of great gags and a surprisingly emotional climax which ultimately renders Tremors: Shrieker Island much closer to perfection than you might think.

SOL HARRIS





VAMPIRES VS. THE BRONX

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

12 • NETFLIX

The spirit of the 1980s, embodied in fun flicks such as The Goonies, Explorers, Flight of the Navigator, etc., and already wonderfully evoked on TV's Stranger Things, lives again in this charming, boisterous entry-level horror movie designed to introduce younger viewers to the world of the undead without giving them screaming nightmares.

The Bronx is slowly being gentrified, with buildings and businesses bought out by the sinister-sounding Murnau Industries (see what they did there?). A likeable bunch of youngsters, already determined to save their local bodega from closing down, begin to suspect that there's something very strange in the neighbourhood when people start to disappear. Bobby Carter (Gerald Jones III) witnesses a vampire attacking a local gangster and along with his friends, he discovers a nest of bloodsuckers spreading out across the Bronx under the cover of a creeping and beneficent incursion into the district. All they have to do is convince their parents and the authorities that Murnau Industries isn't quite what it appears to be.

Vampires vs the Bronx, despite its rather silly and lurid title, is a lot of fun, a real family horror film bursting with heart and passion, a familiar story of young friends enjoying a wild adventure with plenty of scares and mild jeopardy but no real blood-curdling horror. For all its vampiric snarling and slightly cheesy 1990s special effects, there's no bloodletting at all in this nippy, sprightly little film that stars a great young cast of unknowns and plays gamely with all the familiar tropes of the vampire genre. A happy Halloween horror treat!

PAUL MOUNT





THE HAUNTING OF BLY MANOR

REVIEWED: SEASON 1 · NETFLIX

Fans were overjoyed when The Haunting of Hill House was commissioned for a second season back in 2018. The notion of a classier American Horror Story was something everyone could get behind.

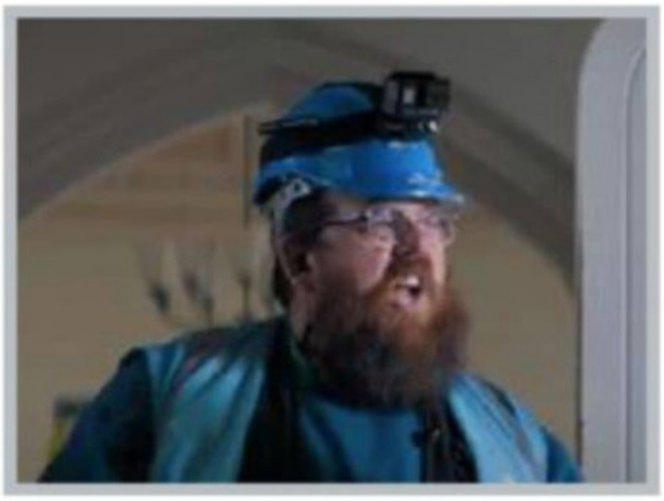
Enter Bly Manor: Season 2 of what is now being called The Haunting. One of the biggest perks of the season-long anthology format being employed is that each miniseries is an opportunity for those involved to branch out and experiment with new ideas. It's surprising, then, that Bly Manor plays so closely to Hill House – not just superficially (they're both ghost stories spanning multiple generations and set in mansions), but in its themes and subtexts, too (the show seemingly isn't interested in big, horror set-pieces any more, but it's every bit as interested in exploring our relationships with time as it ever has been).

Seemingly to try and make things feel fresh, the action takes place in 1980s England, which might have worked had it been a portrayal of England that wasn't so clearly written by Americans and shot in Canada. Still, contrived ending and a lack of new ideas, aside, Bly Manor is a solid show when viewed completely divorced from Hill House. Rahul Kohli and T'Nia Miller are welcome additions to the cast, and while there are some grating child-performances in the mix, newcomer Benjamin Ainsworth is phenomenal.

The penultimate episode – a largely stand-alone adaptation of Henry James' The Romance of Certain Old Clothes – is presented as a black and white period drama, in a throwback to the 'golden age' of the ghost story. It's a delightfully chilling tale that truly understands the relationship between ghosts and sorrow, and it's so good that it more than makes the entire season worthwhile.



SOL HARRIS



TRUTH SEEKERS

REVIEWED: SEASON I

prime video

Simon Pegg and Nick Frost are one of the most well-regarded comedy duos in the world. The team have starred in many genre-savvy movies and shows together and have a memorable on-screen chemistry that immediately sells any given story. Though Truthseekers stars both Pegg and Frost, it is not a return of the famous double act, instead it feels more like their passing of the torch to new talent. It's also one of the best supernatural comedies we've seen.

Nick Frost plays Gus, an ageing broadband engineer who has an interest in all things strange, including the likes of number stations and anomalous phenomena. He is obsessed with ghosts and we learn early on that his obsession comes from personal tragedy. His boss Dave (Simon Pegg) pairs Gus up with a young chap called Elton (Samson Kayo). Though technically Gus is only supposed to show Elton how to fix people's Internet, the pair quickly become a pair a ghost-hunters. Turns out ghosts cause havoc with Wi-Fi...

Along the way, Gus picks up other young friends until we end up with a Scooby Gang of spook busters, all crammed into Gus's van. These include the sardonic Richard (Malcolm McDowell) and the angst-ridden Helen (played by the brilliantly funny Susan Wokoma).

Each episode is both 'spook of the week' and part of a growing arc plot that stacks up into a greater mystery. We also learn more about the gang; each has a secret and a regret. This is a show about how damaged, lonely people end up coming together over a fascination of weird things and haphazard adventures, interspersed with genuinely funny moments. A future pop-culture classic.

ED FORTUNE





SPITTING IMAGE

REVIEWED: SEASON I (EPISODES I-2)

britbox

Spitting Image enjoys a respected reputation here in the UK and, in its '80s heyday, this puppet comedy series found itself at the top of political discussion, controversy, and TV schedules. Now, 24 years on, this BritBox exclusive revival is here to find out if the puppets can still pull people's strings...

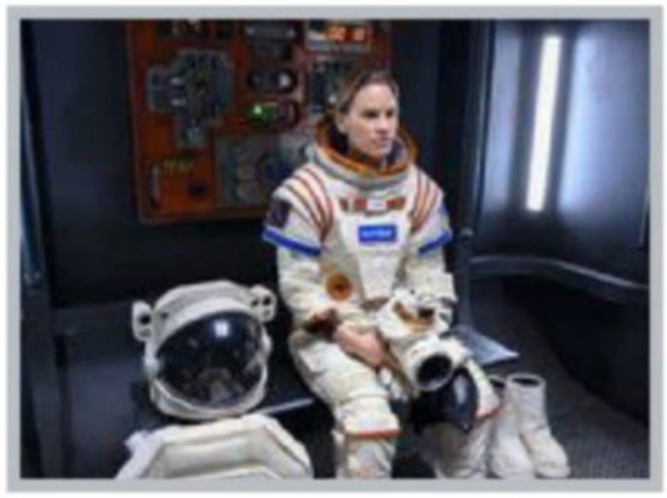
These first two fun episodes may not have immediately resurrected the show's memorable firebrand years of scathing satire, but the potential is certainly here. Yes, some caricatures are a touch wonky (Dwayne Johnson, for instance), as are some gags, but we expect that the show, much like its earliest days, will hit its groove throughout the series.

Boris Johnson and Donald Trump are obviously the main targets, but the creepy alien overlord Dominic Cummings and Greta Thunberg (who turns her planet-saving passions to weather forecasting and football) are the show-stealer characters thus far. While other highlights include Priti Patel's dominatrix vampire and New Zealand PM Jacinda Ardern as a Covid-conquering Mary Poppins. Meanwhile, the gleeful vulgarity (Michael Gove's bollock face, Trump's extendable hairy arsehole sending tweets) and fairly balanced political comedy (Episode 2 aims left, while Episode 1 aims right) make a comeback.

In an age where a necklace and a dance routine receive record Ofcom complaints, or the response to institutional racism and police brutality is renaming rice and erasing older TV, it is remarkable satire can survive, as our ridiculous world is almost beyond it. But it's strangely comforting that Spitting Image can return and still (as the Twitter furore and the USA's hesitation to even screen it prove) have that power to wind folk right up! Welcome back, guys!

JACK BOTTOMLEY





AWAY

REVIEWED: SEASON I

NETFLIX

This chasmic cosmic melodrama is often as dull as ditch water – and sometimes even considerably duller – but there's something endearing about its formulaic plotting, its soap opera-level character development, and its transparent box-ticking that makes it an agreeably watchable experience, even as whole episodes stagger by with nothing at all happening to inch the story along.

In Away's promising first episode, we meet mission commander Emma Green (Hilary Swank) preparing to set off on a three-year voyage to Mars with a crew who don't trust her because of an incident on the way to the moon. Back on Earth, her husband Matt (Josh Charles) – a former astronaut grounded due to a serious health condition, and her moody teenage daughter Alexis (Talitha Bateman) – are trying to come to terms with the prospect of Emma's protracted absence. Despite a massive family setback, Emma elects to stay with the mission but she's plagued by guilt and feelings of self-doubt even as she struggles to win the respect of her crew who have their own demons (as we discover in tortuous flashbacks throughout the series).

Away runs out of rocket fuel very quickly (whole episodes pass without even a handy establishing shot of the spaceship to remind us of where we are), but it pulls its space-socks up in its last two episodes as the Atlas approaches Mars and begins a dangerous descent towards the planet's surface. It's hard quite to see where Away can really go in any second series without repeating the same heart-tugging beats, but there's just about enough propulsion in the first episode of this run to keep your interest until the show picks up the pace in the home straight.

PAUL MOUNT





THE INDHUN CHRONICLES

REVIEWED: SEASON I

NETFLIX

Netflix has gotten into animation in a big way recently and we have a steadily growing catalogue of animated science fiction and fantasy shows on the service. The Idhun Chronicles is an attempt at adapting the Spanish fantasy novel series The Idhún's Memories and it 'almost' gets it right.

The novels are an adventure drama aimed at young adults. They mix teen angst with tales of sinister invaders. The world of Idhun has come to Earth. It has brought with it dragons, magic, and other incredible dangers. A young man and a team of his friends acquire the power and skill to change the destiny of both worlds, though the cost seems high. In other words, standard fantasy fare.

Unfortunately. the animated series spends way too much time telling you about all the awesome things and not enough time showing them to you. When the show remembers that cartoons are a visual medium, we get some great moments but there are simply not enough of them.

In a way, the show is reminiscent of cult anime show RWBY. Both feature amazing fight scenes and solid animation, but suffer from spending way too much time exploring the world. Info dumps are far too common. Unlike RWBY, The Iduhn Chronicles can't really spare the time to lecture the viewer on the settings's metaphysics, but it does it anyway. There's a lot of potential here, but the series simply doesn't give itself any space to breathe. It is very pretty though, let's hope they figure out how to tell a story before the next season!

ED FORTUNE





CLOSE ENOUGH

REVIEWED: SEASON I

NETFLIX

J.G. Quintel has followed up Regular Show with an eccentric and ludicrous trip through the early years of adulthood. Close Enough focuses on married couple Josh (Quintel) and Emily (Gabrielle Walsh) as they deal with everything from parenting woes to the revelation that they are only getting older. They live with a recently divorced couple in a rented house and trust their daughter to a yoga-hippie school teacher every day of the week. And animals can talk. Sometimes.

Close Enough is colourful and pacy - most of the 'episodes' are less than 15 minutes, but Netflix bunch two together at a time to form a first season of (almost) eight double bills. Quintel's direction of humour is very distinctive, absurd situations blended with more down-to-earth concerns about L.A. geography and the woes of becoming a fully fledged adult. The result is a show that feels close to home, but also incredibly funny. Compared to the likes of Rick & Morty or BoJack Horseman, it can't handle the big topics or individual characters with the emotional nuance that the best adult animations have become known for. Depth is not Close Enough's strong suit. Rather than letting you sit back and think, it whisks you away on a bizarre journey of VR ladder-climbing and British snails with hats that slow down time.

With immediately likeable characters and a sound number of full belly laughs, Close Enough just barely justifies a place in the increasingly competitive animation market. It's relatable enough to have a certain pull, but strange enough to leave you bewildered and wanting more.

JAMES HANTON





UTOPIA

REVIEWED: SEASON I • prime video

When the US remake of the quirky and surreal British TV show Utopia was announced, it caused quite a stir amongst fans. The original show suffered from a lack of a decent budget but with Amazon-style money, it was a promising idea. Alas, the world had other ideas.

2013's Utopia was a well-timed pop culture hit. A darkly funny and meandering tale about comic books, killer viruses, and conspiracy theories seemed like quaint fantasy fodder seven years ago. It's distinctly European vibe simply added to the charm. A lot has changed since then and the entire idea behind the show has lost both its urgency and relevance. US remakes of British shows tend to be a roll of the dice at the best of times, but this Utopia is simply lacking.

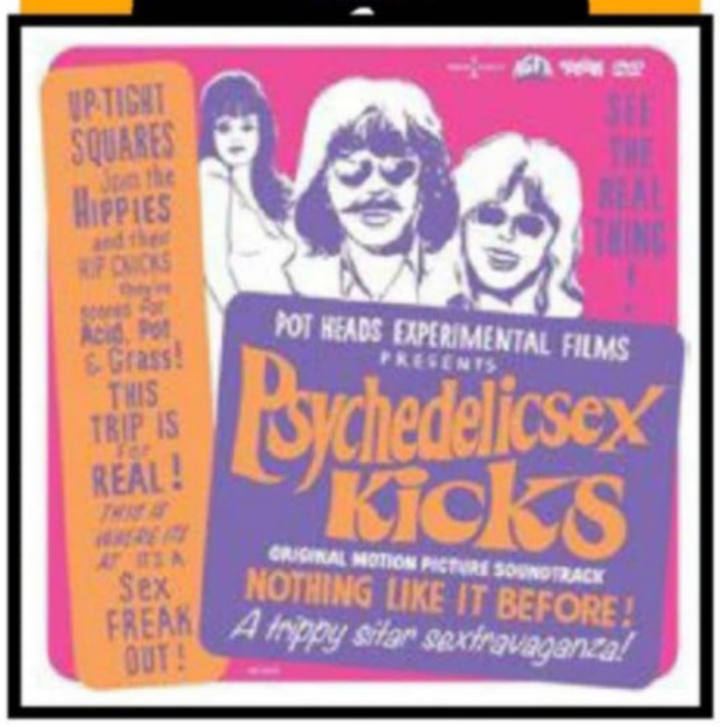
For a start, the timing is terrible. Comic books are now more mainstream than ever. Conspiracy theories are now no longer a laughing matter and the real-world is stuck with a global pandemic. Suddenly, the premise of the show doesn't feel as fun or as off-the-wall as it once was. Add to this the distinctly nasty and violent direction the remake takes from the start, and we get something that just isn't fun to watch.

The humour has also been boiled out. The main characters are no longer geeky weirdoes who get in over their heads, but tragic figures with no direction. The shadowy opposition feels flat and clichéd. Even the actual direction is boring and by the numbers. Avoid this and re-watch the original.

ED FORTUNE



THE STARBURST GUIDE TO THE SOUNDTRACK SCENE
BY NICK SPACEK



We Release Whatever the Fuck We Want Records (WRWTFWW) is releasing the soundtracks for the Empire Pictures cult classics **Ghoulies**, **Troll**, and **TerrorVision** on limited edition, coloured, half-speed-mastered vinyl this November. They all come with new cover art, liner notes from composer Richard Band, and the jackets not only feature obi strips, but genre-appropriate video store stickers, as well. The listings on Bandcamp also describe the gatefolds as having the entire film 'on paper', whatever that might mean, but colour me intrigued. Now, while **TerrorVision** was originally released by Restless Records in 1986, it's long been out of print, and due to the film's cult status, it sold poorly upon original release. This was a shame, because Band's score is fantastic, as are the synth new wave cuts by Los Angeles band The Fibonaccis, who'd expected this to be their big break. Sadly, it was not, but the film has gained in popularity in recent years, thanks to a 2013 Scream Factory Blu-ray release. This new release comes as a 'special director's cut soundtrack' pressed on on 180-gram blue vinyl. It appears that this is similar to the 2017 Intrada compact disc reissue, but with tracks conjoined, as opposed to 20 separate cues. **Ghoulies** might be Richard Band's finest score. While many folks lean into **Re-Animator** - and for good reason - **Ghoulies** is whimsical, fun, and energetic. Also, this 180-gram pink vinyl record marks the first-ever release of the full uncut original soundtrack and it includes a bonus 7-inch featuring Fela Johnson's pop songs *Dancing with a Monster* and *Surrender*. **Troll** is a straight reissue of the original 1985 release - also on Restless - and it was also reissued on compact disc by Intrada in 2006, with a limited vinyl reissue in 2016. This version does have new art, on 180-gram yellow vinyl.

As if that wasn't enough, WRWTFWW also has a super-duper limited edition white label LP. Only 100 copies will be made of **Coming Soon from Empire Pictures...**, which features 20 audio versions of the company's movie trailers from 1983-1989. It includes everything from **Robot Jox** to **Sorority Babes in the Slimeball Bowl-O-Rama**, and I am likely more excited for this than anything else, because if it's limited edition and kind of silly and weird, I am there for it.

Speaking of which: for Record Store Day Black Friday - which, as an American, I cannot believe has become a thing in the UK and Europe, given that it's the day after Thanksgiving, which is an exclusively American holiday, but vive la capitalism, I suppose - Modern Harmonic has decided to up the ante on their amazing 2020, which has already included the scores for **Psychedelic Sex Kicks**, **Dracula (The Dirty Old Man)**, and **Girl in Gold Boots**. For RSD Black Friday, the label will be presenting Milton DeLugg & The Little Eskimos' original performance of *Hooray For Santa Claus* from **Santa Claus Conquers the Martians**. Available on 7-inch single for the first time since 1964, this resoundingly-cheery earworm of a song comes on 'Martian Green' vinyl (naturally) with a cover of the song by garage rockers The Fleshtones on the B-side. Included in the package is a DVD of The Film Detective's print of the camp Christmas classic, paired with some equally bough-rockin' festive oddities from the Something Weird vault. It's limited to 1500 copies, so you bet your sweet bottom I will be doing my best to lay my hands upon a copy.



Also out on Black Friday will be another holiday-themed release: 1984 Publishing's vinyl release of Morgan Ames' Christimas songs for 1984's Santa slasher **Silent Night Deadly Night**. Now, you would be correct in noting that this music was also released by Death Waltz in 2014. It was the second disc of a double LP, which also featured the score by Perry Botkin. However, this release has been remastered, features new art, and includes two songs previously unreleased, *Merry Christmas Sweetheart* and *Christmas in My Dreams*. The LP comes on 'Chimney Hellfire red and orange opaque swirl vinyl, includes two one-of-a-kind,







hand cut, laminated 35mm strips of film (eight film cells) from an original 1984 print of **Silent Night, Deadly Night** and is limited to 1500 copies.

If you're looking to snag Botkin's score, it'll see a separate - but also remastered - re-release through Burning Witches Records later this year. That label, by the way, just released the Matt Glass score for Brea Grant's **12 Hour Shift**, and there has not a more unique score put out this year. The amalgamation of cello, drums, and vocal operatics stands in stark contrast to the madcap dark humour of Grant's film, and is wholly unique. It's available now on vinyl and digital from Burning Witches' Bandcamp, and listening to it will bring happiness to any fan of the film and make anyone who's yet to see **12 Hour Shift** seek it out immediately.

Since theatres are effectively shut down, the slate of new soundtrack releases has been rather minimal, although there was Ludwig Göransson's score for Christopher Nolan's **Tenet**, a film that apparently wasn't a big enough deal to get folks to the cinema during a pandemic. Evidently, crashing an actual jet airliner can't compete with the fear of possible contracting a life-threatening illness. The last theatrical experience I had was, quite literally, seeing **The Rise of Skywalker** on Christmas Day. That said, the score for **Tenet** is quite good, and it's nice to hear someone other than regular Nolan collaborator Hans Zimmer tackle one of these epic flicks. For longtime fans of the composer's work, the high-energy, rhythmic qualities for which Göransson is known are there, but the strong use of electronic elements and a certain amount of glitchiness makes this unique in his filmography.

Other than **Tenet**, new score releases have otherwise mainly been relegated to those for films released on Netflix and other streaming services. They have been, for the most part, unfortunately rather forgettable. While I'm not exclusively against pop music soundtracks, many of these releases have failed to grab my ears in any way, shape, or form, as there's been a dearth of interesting or intriguing sounds. Happily, however, Daniel Pemberton's score for the Netflix release of **Enola Holmes** immediately took hold of my interest. Pemberton's score has a strong amount of Sherlock Holmes-related sounds against which it can be judged, from Hans Zimmer's score for the two Guy Ritchie films, to David Arnold and Michael Price's exquisite work on BBC's **Sherlock**, and even Sean Callery's music for the CBS series **Elementary**. Happily, it holds its own quite well, and is a joy to listen to. Thanks to copious use of energetic strings, the vibrancy of the movie - which focuses on Sherlock and Mycroft Holmes' younger sister, Enola, played by Millie Bobbie Brown - comes through. Pemberton's decision to utilise folkier instruments, such as an acoustic bass guitar and banjo give **Enola Holmes**' score a less-mannered texture, well-suited to the rough-and-tumble protagonist. It's a capital release, out now on digital platforms from Milan.

Back in 2018, Cartoon Network's **Adult Swim** began releasing short films, which they called **Smalls**. Covering a wide variety of genres and styles, the series was designed to cultivate original short-form content by emerging animators and diverse comedic voices from around the world. Earlier this month, the channel surprise-announced that they'd be digitally releasing the music to many of the popular short films, beginning with French composer Thomas Cappeau's score to the **Jamir at Home** series. The score album only runs a little more than nine minutes, but the selection of synthesiser music is charmingly low-budget, and will appeal both to fans of the series of shorts, as well as those who enjoy lo-fi electronic scores by the likes of Jean Richard. Out about the time you'll be reading this issue will be Noah Malone's **Sticky Jingles** and **Thought Diary** by Daniel Koren, as well, although they hadn't been released at press time.

Finally, it's worth noting that if you've enjoyed the music for Netflix's **Russian Doll** or **The Midnight Gospel**, then you'll be a fan of composer Joe Wong. In September, he put out his first-ever solo album, entitled **Nite Creatures**, which is available on vinyl from Decca Records. Several of the songs featured on the album have found their way onto some of the shows that Wong has worked on, including the album opener, *Dreams Washed Away*, from which they made a music video, featuring footage from **The Midnight Gospel**. If you love lush pop records from the '60s and '70s, this is definitely worth your time, and if you like Wong's scoring work, there will be a deluxe edition of the album released, which features all of **Nite Creatures**' tracks as instrumentals.





PUBLISHER: BBC SOUNDS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Happy Day! Children of the Stones is back! Regarded by those who remember it as one of the most terrifying kids' TV shows of all time, the pagan horror story gets a modern revitalisation in this BBC audio drama. New girl in town Mia Brake (India Brown) discovers that not all is well in piddling little Milbury, moving to the English village after a family tragedy. Mia and dad Adam (Steve Oram) are quick to learn that its ancient stone circle is more than just a pretty rock garden.

The stones' ancient power exerts a strange hold on the residents of Milbury, manifesting in their fake smiles, sudden mathematical genius, and the phrase 'happy day'. As Mia's friends begin to fall under the stones' thrall, she must use her own powers – podcasting and a form of telepathy – to decipher their secret.

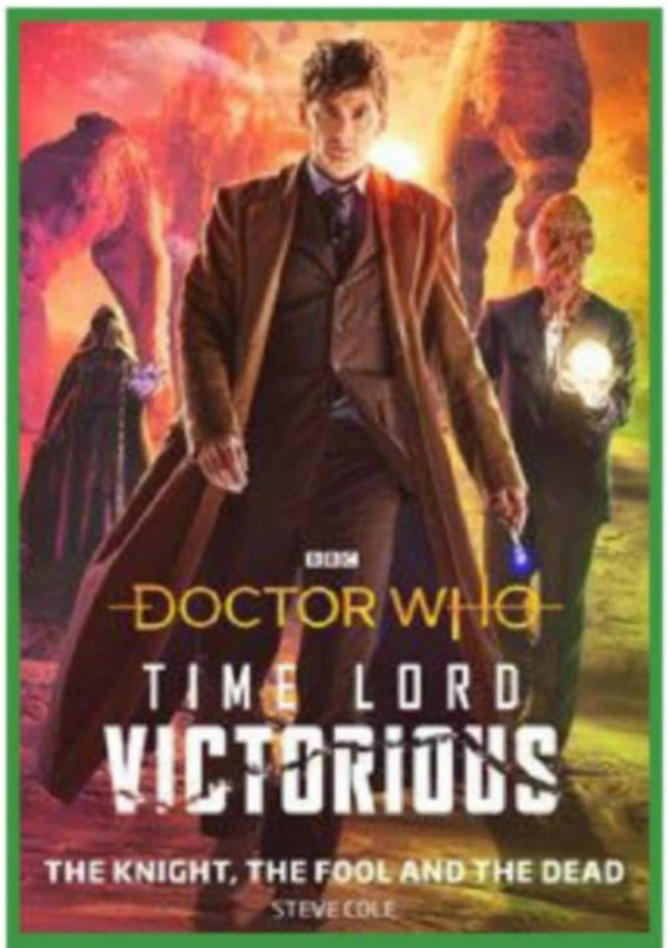
It's been over forty years since Children of the Stones first aired on TV and, while the story remains iconic to genre fans of a certain age, newer audiences will likely be oblivious. This ten-part Radio 4 drama comes updated for our modern age, recasting its lead – not only as female, but a podcaster too. The script comes littered with references to Marvel's Avengers, mansplaining, and multiple modern technologies. Thankfully, it hasn't forgotten to be scary - and sound designer Richard Fox does a wonderful job of ensuring that this adaptation manages to stay creepy and unsettling. It's unlikely to bother the jaded modern audience of 2020 much, but its atmospherics are effective regardless.

If Brown is well-cast as young Mia, Oram is surprisingly disappointing as dad Adam. While the Sightseers star isn't exactly 'bad', his performance feels weirdly disconnected from his radio daughter – like he's acting in an entirely different story from everyone else. Which is a shame, as Reece Shearsmith and Ralph Ineson are perfectly cast as the celebrity podcaster and the town weirdo, respectively.

Whether or not listeners have a pre-existing relationship with the story, Children of the Stones is a treat. It updates the story for a new generation while staying true to the spirit of the original. It's unlikely to scare anyone like the original television show once did, but its tone and atmosphere are on point. This unsettling work of pagan ritualist horror makes good use of the audio drama form; revitalising the children of the stones to traumatise a new generation of listeners. If they bother with it at all, that is. Aren't the kids all into podcasts these days?

JOEL HARLEY





FORMAT: HARDCOVER
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Time Lord Victorious has been marketed as an epic Doctor Who adventure told across novels, comics, audios, immersive theatre and more; in fact, it's so epic that no one seems to know where to start. The answer to that is Steve Cole's novel The Knight, the Fool, and the Dead.

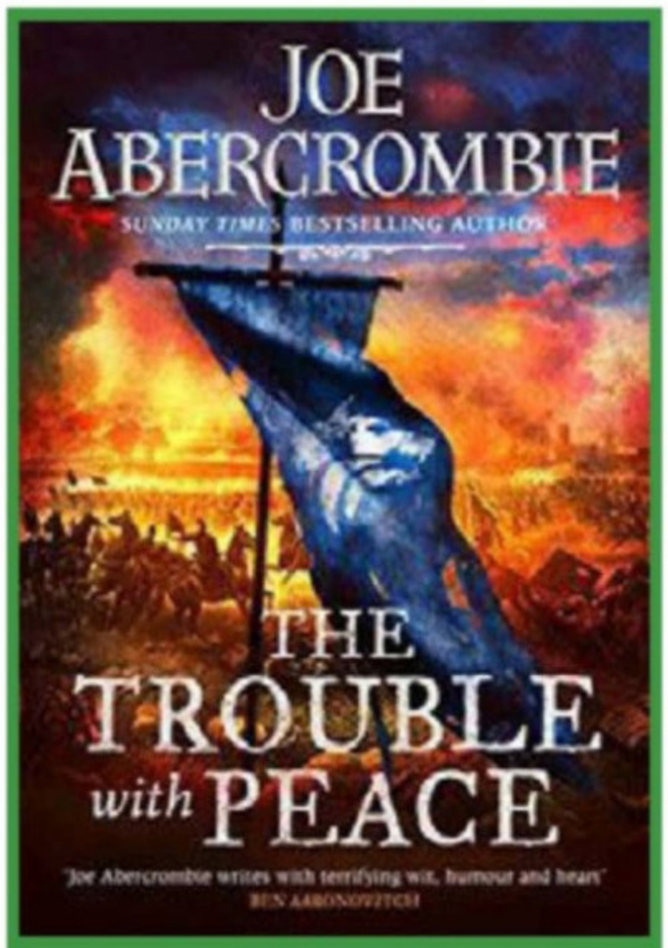
You may recognise 'Time Lord Victorious' as the name David Tennant's Doctor gives himself in 2009's The Waters of Mars. This book follows on from that episode's ending, as the Doctor travels billions of years into the past.

In this era, the races of the universe live out indefinite lifespans, but veiled nasties the Kotturuh are putting an end to that, dispensing mortality as part of their grand design. Their powers are hard to stomach for those who prefer Who stories with a more scientific basis, but they're nonetheless seriously creepy, one of the more creative of recent additions to the Doctor's list of enemies.

There's also some interesting character development for the Doctor, exploring the arrogance of this latter period of his Tenth life. His ego puts him on a collision course with the Kotturuh and leads to a universe-changing decision that sets up the whole multimedia saga. It's not all serious stuff, though – Brian the Ood assassin provides excellent comic relief.

It's only a short book, at under 180 pages, but Cole fits in a lot; fast-paced and thrilling, this will assuage doubts about Time Lord Victorious and leave you checking the calendar for the next instalment's release.

KIERON MOORE



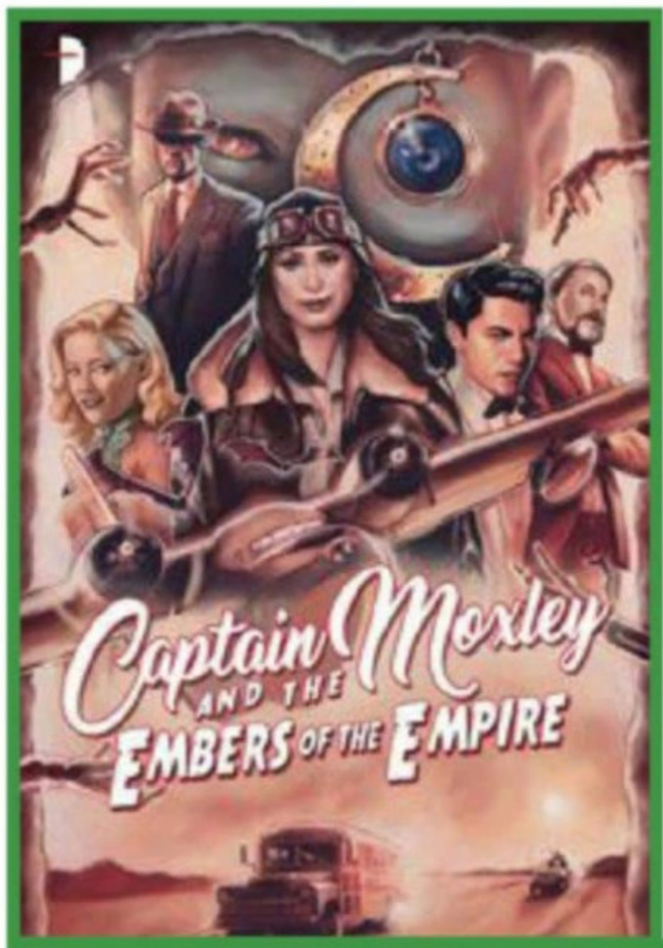
FORMAT: HARDBACK
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

You'd be forgiven in thinking that, after the events of A Little Hatred, Joe Abercrombie would be giving his characters a bit of a breather. After all, there's been so much going on, surely they deserve time to gather themselves and regroup? Fortunately for us, Abercrombie is a writer who doesn't allow his characters to stand still, often forcing them to grow in entirely unexpected directions. The blurb accompanying this book promises conspiracy, betrayal, and rebellion, all of which is delivered by the bucketload, the author ramping up the tension and intrigue with every passing page.

Abercrombie's characterisation remains sublime – they're all brutally realistic inhabitants of a world that is continuously built upon – and his plotting skills shine in this book. Nothing's straightforward as the various parties plot against one another, and even the reader is sometimes left wondering who to trust. The prose is immersive as ever, the narrative imbued with the tics and accents of its point-of-view characters. As the more familiar of them fall to the side (a warning, there may be tears) their heirs and successors earn their place in our hearts, offering shocks and surprises as they scheme for control.

This is a book that builds on the brilliance of its predecessor, delivering a story that refuses to release the reader until the very last page. Written with the sly wit and visceral moments we've come to expect, The Trouble with Peace is a magnificent read that will leave fans begging for more.

ALISTER DAVISON



FORMAT: PAPERBACK
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

What would you get if you gender-swapped Indiana Jones and gave him a Mancunian makeover? The answer is Captain Samantha Moxley, the star of author Dan Hanks' debut novel Captain Moxley and the Embers of the Empire.

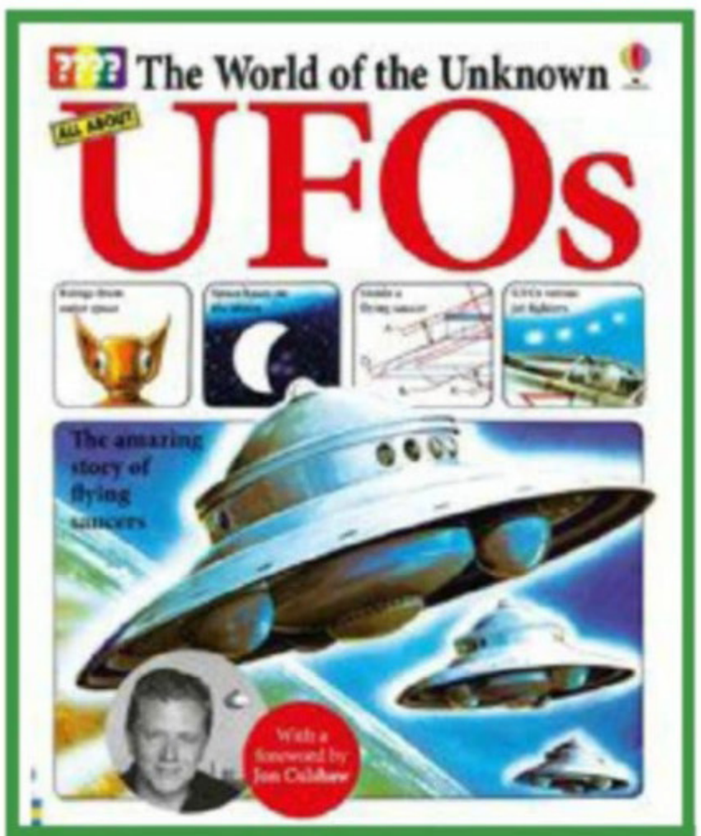
In 1952, ex-Spitfire pilot Moxley is drawn into a quest for the greatest archaeological find in history: the fabled Hall of Records. The result is a loving throwback to old-fashioned pulp fiction adventures; full of danger, monsters, mysticism, and Nazi-punching action. Hopping from New York to Paris to Egypt, the book rolls along at break-neck pace, reading like a novelisation of a hit movie you never saw.

What makes it more than just slavish pastiche, though, is that Hanks has thoroughly brought this type of story into 2020. Moxley is a true post-colonial hero, frowning on western tomb-raiders thieving indigenous treasures. There's also no demonising of foreign cultures here, as the villains of the piece are the US government, hoping to access age-old powers for their own ends.

The complex relationship between Moxley and her younger sister, archaeologist Jess, is also one of the book's best strengths, with the two women rarely seeing eye to eye but having a familial bond all the same. Their dynamic is at the heart of the story, and Hanks clearly has ideas for how to develop things between them in future instalments.

If you're looking for some thrills, spills and old-school escapism, then hop into the cockpit with Captain Moxley and let her take you for a ride.

CHRISTIAN BONE



FORMAT: HARDCOVER
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Following the huge success of Usborne's re-issue of All About Ghosts, comes the fantastic All About UFOs. Here, Ted Wilding-White takes us on a guided tour of ancient alien visitations, historical sightings, worldwide waves of reports, cases involving jet pilots and astronauts, UFOs in the cinema, and close encounters with aliens.

As a balance to these incredible stories, there are chapters on explanations for UFO sightings, fake UFO photographs, unusual man-made aircraft, and how to investigate and report sightings. The possible extra-terrestrial origins of UFOs, what aliens might look like on their home planets and how we might achieve star flight are also explored in gorgeous full colour illustrations.

Aimed at children and young teenagers, it is an exciting fact-filled ride into the weird world of UFOs. As comedian and amateur astronomer Jon Coleslaw says in his foreword, the mystery and edge of fear inspired by this book gave him a life-long interest in the possibility of extra-terrestrial life. No doubt it had a big impact on many other young minds who gazed at these stunning images of ET visitations and followed the instructions to build their own model flying saucer, fake their own UFO pictures, or search the heavens.

Published in 1978, just when interest in UFOs was given a boost by the release of Spielberg's Close Encounters of the Third Kind, this encapsulates a world before the Roswell and Rendlesham incidents, men in black, crop circles, and alien abductions took centre stage. As such it is a very welcome slice of nostalgia that will hopefully inspire future generations of ufologists.

NIGEL WATSON

BOOK >> WORMHOLE

A VINTAGE GENRE PICK FROM KATE FATHERS

Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination is a collection of very human horror. Edogawa Rampo is often billed as both a mystery and horror writer, which is fitting given that he was inspired by Edgar Allan Poe, even taking a Japanese version of the author's name as a pseudonym. Rampo's stories occupy the space between the two genres, as they're not only intriguing whodunits, but disturbing explorations of the worst parts of human behaviour.

That exploration starts with *The Human Chair*, a story about a craftsman who hides himself inside a commissioned chair, falling in love and lust with the women who sit in it. This story, told to a writer named Yoshiko, sets up the key elements that are seen throughout the collection: there's an unreliable narrator who is 'ugly beyond description'. The characters and audience are manipulated in some way. There are traces of greed. *The Human Chair* is a visceral story, making you feel just as confused and violated as its characters, and it primes you to question every narrator - and every story - that comes after it.

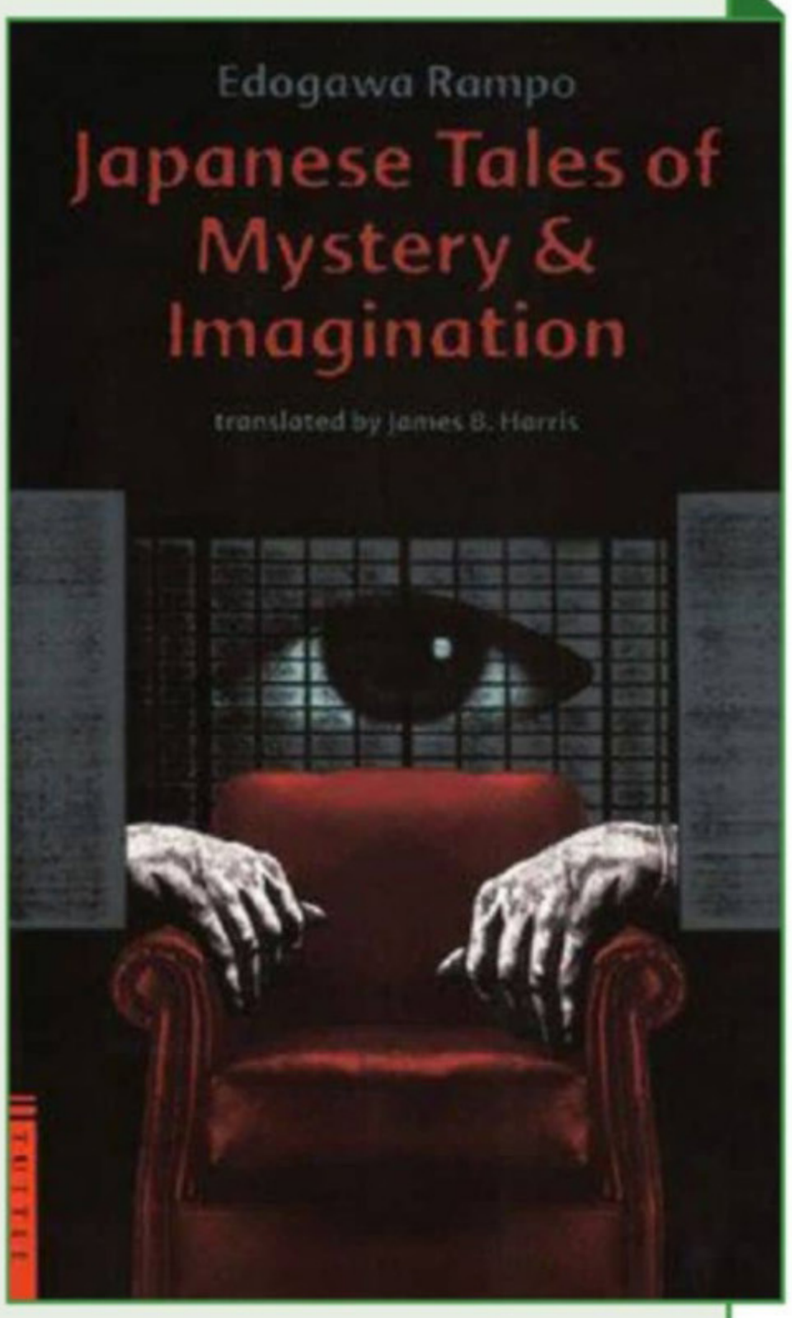
Like in *The Caterpillar*, a perverse tragedy about a quadruple amputee and his wife. Or *Two Crippled Men*, a story about a man named Ihara, who tells a stranger about his youthful sleepwalking, all the while believing that he sees something familiar in the man's scarred face. Similarly, *The Red Chamber*, where Tanaka tells a group of men how he caused accidental deaths out of boredom. *The Cliff*, written in script form, strips down the death of a woman's first husband to its bare element: greed.

Rampo explores his key elements from multiple angles, using a variety of story structures, which not only keeps the collection fresh, but allows for an examination of what can be very typical horror themes. Under Rampo's pen, ugliness isn't just ugliness; it's a tool for manipulation and a tragic consequence of war. Characters are greedy not only for money, but for love, entertainment, and even physical contact. While Rampo's stories are short and fast-paced, they are stuffed with complex characters and even more complex meaning, which makes even the weakest story a joy to read.

Only one story interrupts the collection's cohesion, and that's the supernatural horror story *The Traveller with the Pasted Rag Picture*. While the supernatural elements are subtle and are challenged by the trend of unreliable narrators, it's interesting to see a collection that is so rooted in the horror of humanity end with magic. Perhaps it was done to further unbalance the reader. If so, it succeeds.

Rampo is a masterful storyteller, one who deals in not only murder mysteries, but violations of trust and the grotesqueness of human action. If you like your horror free from ghosts and ghouls, then this is a collection that you don't want to miss.

Edogawa Rampo is the author of numerous short stories and novels, including the Private Detective Kogoro Akechi series.



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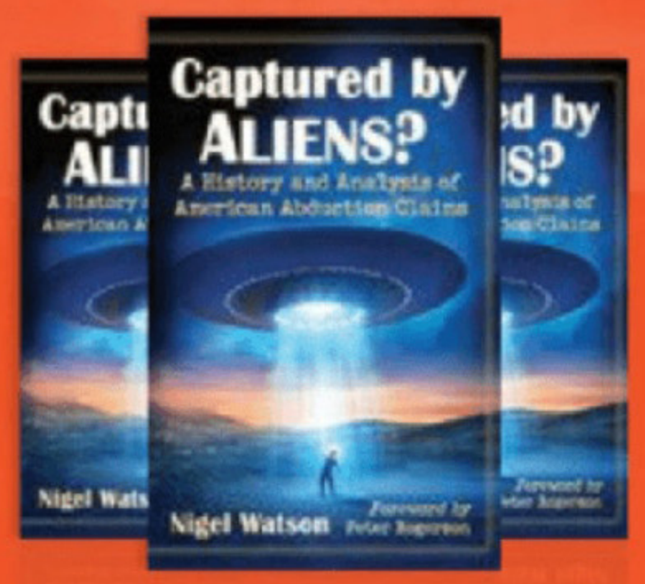
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STRONTIUM DOG: SEARCH AND DESTROY THE STARLORD YEARS

FORMAT: HARDCOVER

RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 12TH

In some other world, 2000 AD's classic bounty hunter comic strip Strontium Dog is a well-loved TV show that evokes samurai and western themes with a sci-fi aesthetic. Sadly, we aren't in that timeline, instead, we have a wealth of Strontium Dog comics.

Strontium Dog – Search and Destroy brings together the strips from the comic Starlord, a short-lived science fiction anthology comic book that was merged with 2000 AD back in the day when merging comic book titles was still a thing. Strontium Dog is the futuristic story of Johnny Alpha, a Search/Destroy Agent for the Galactic Crime Commission. Johnny is a mutant and as such he's not allowed to have a normal life; very few jobs are available, but hunting down criminals is allowed. S/D agents are nicknamed Strontium Dogs, after the radioactive element.

Johnny has all sorts of cool futuristic weapons and mutant eyes that glow (and can also see through walls). He is assisted by Wulf Sternhammer, a strong and very large Viking of a man who fights villains with his enormous hammer. Mostly they go to colourful places and murder bad guys, occasionally taking in the sights before going on to the next mission. It's essentially a series of short but sweet crime adventure stories. With a side-order of Johnny having to cope with bigots hating him because he's a mutant.

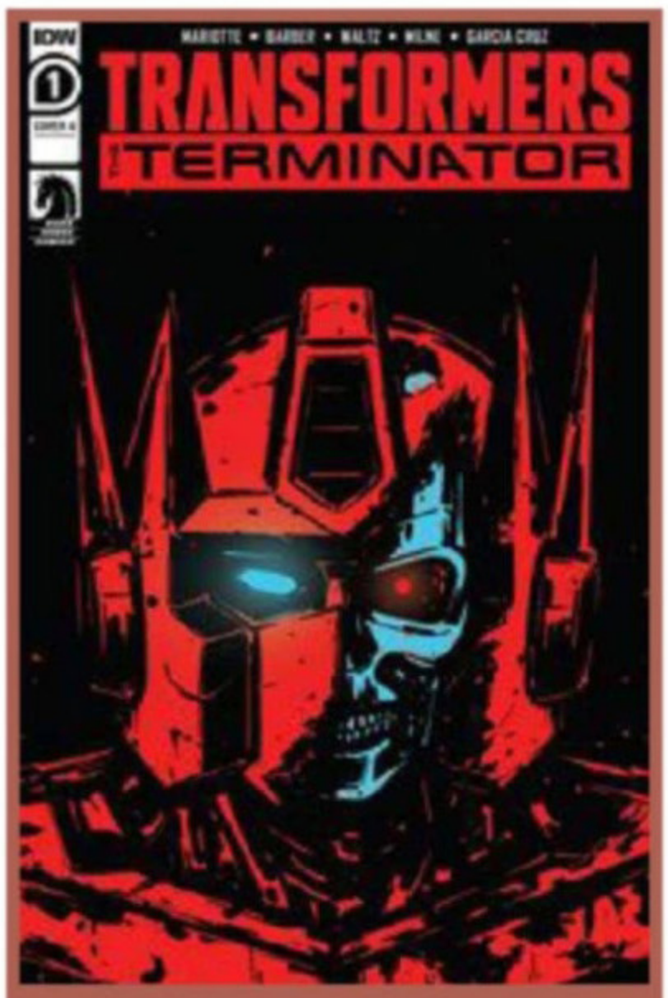
As these are the early stories, you may expect it to be rough around the edges. Nothing could be further from the truth; Johnny and Wulf are fully formed as characters and pretty much the whole set-up is there. The broader story notes, such as the Search/Destroy base and the other agents came later. These strips are solely about Johnny, Wulf, and the friends they make on the way.

The biggest feature here is Carlos Ezquerra's absolutely gorgeous art. It's an early example of Carlos' genius. Writer John Wagner has always been fond of creating weird monsters in his stories and Carlos excels at making odd ideas look utterly strange and surreal.

Some of the pages are in glorious full colour and it really enhances the art, it's a pity that the other pages aren't colourised, but then it is supposed to be a reprint rather than a remaster. The stories are fun and if you don't know about this sci-fi bounty hunter and want to, then this is an excellent place to start.

ED FORTUNE





FORMAT: TRADE PAPERBACK
RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 15TH

If the '80s was your favourite decade for sci-fi, then the idea of combining Transformers and The Terminator into one story sounds like – whatever the outcome – something you'd be curious to see. Today, that vision lives in the form of IDW's ambitious crossover. In this alternative reality, a T-800 is sent back in time to 1984 to stop Transformers from destroying life on Earth as we know it. Once back, it bumps into the warrior Sarah Connor, and surprisingly uncovers that there's a hero side to the transformers, the Autobots!

With that kick-ass confidence Sarah Connor is known for shouting out of the pages, fused with those unearthly, god-like speeches from Optimus Prime, Transformers vs The Terminator smashes it when it comes to embracing the spirit of its characters. On top of this, we see further Cybertronian main players like Bumblebee, Wheeljack, and Ratchet to name a few, and there are a ton of cool Easter eggs thrown in.

The story mutates at a fast pace, and before you know it you've got a full-on war as The Terminator – through the leadership persuasion of Sarah Connor - joins forces with the Autobots to stop the Decepticons from finding a way to produce Energon in Cyberdyne Systems. An outrageous idea like this could be over the top, but it's thankfully been handled with care, all building towards a worthwhile finale.

ANDREW DEX



FORMAT: TRADE PAPERBACK
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 10TH

When Marvel announced they were resetting the numbering of their Star Wars series back to #1 less than five years after relaunching with their million-selling return to the franchise, many fans understandably asked "Why?" Indeed, as this new era delves into the post-The Empire Strikes Back narrative, surely using that title would have made more sense? Perhaps, but these are mere details as we tackle head-on the aftermath of the greatest of all sequels, writer Charles Soule wasting no time in taking us back to familiar locations.

Within the first four issues, we have already travelled to Tatooine with Lando as he hunts for clues regarding coffee table Han Solo's whereabouts, while Luke zips back to Bespin to search of his lost lightsabre. It's an odd decision – arriving on Tatooine in Return of the Jedi always felt like the final stop on a long, circuitous galactic journey, while returning to Bespin so quickly feels off somehow, despite our heroes all having valid reasons to be there. So it's when Luke's search eventually leads him to the world of Serelia following a vision where the real 'beyond the movie' story starts, as we head away from the familiar and into new worlds and situations.

The art from Jesus Saiz is crisp and solid, and Soule has consistently proven he knows these characters well, so Marvel's flagship Star Wars title is certainly still one to keep up with.

MARK NEWBOLD



FORMAT: TRADE PAPERBACK
RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 15TH

In what seems like an impossibility, Dr. Strange has gotten the use of his hands back, and is widely regarded as the best neurosurgeon on the planet. He works hard to fulfill his Hippocratic oath and restore health to those in dire need.

However, Dr. Strange remains on-call as sorcerer supreme, and has to juggle his duties as a world-renowned surgeon with saving the multiverse from magical threats. Old foes come out of nowhere, wielding strangely familiar weapons, and it seems that the world of sorcery has a black market on its hands.

Who is behind this mystical criminal enterprise? Why does their magic seem so familiar? Why is Dr. Druid seemingly back from the dead? And, most importantly, can Dr. Strange keep his commitments to his patients and his employers at the hospital?

Under the Knife contains gorgeous artwork by Kev Walker depicting a multitude of mystical universes, some familiar, and some brand-new. His approach to depicting them is new and refreshing. It is distinct from that of earlier artists such as Steve Ditko but holds fantastical merit of its own.

The writing by Mark Waid successfully juggles the balance between reality and the mystical, realistically depicting the world of New York City and the medical profession while drawing us into a mystical whodunit in the magic worlds with an answer and a resolution that will truly shock you.

ALEC FRAZIER



FORMAT: SINGLE ISSUE
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

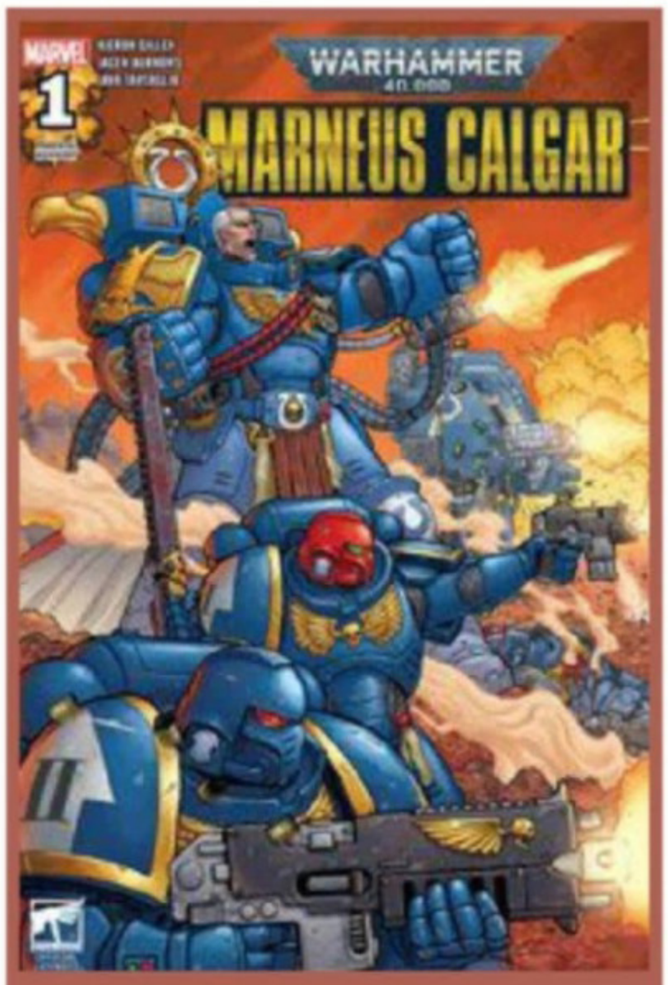
Nobody dies in comic books. Or, if they do, they never die for long. This is the dilemma at the opening of Immortal She Hulk. Jennifer Walters has gotten into a habit of dying. Thankfully, she also has a habit of coming back, but that's where the existential dilemma lies.

Turning to death, resurrection and general healing expert Wolverine, and resident immortality expert Thor, She Hulk/Jen Walters spends a good chunk of the story exploring recent events, her many deaths, and the implications of her inability to stay dead. Rest assured, if you're looking for ass-kicking comic book action, and not just existential angst, the implications are not good. Cosmic horror, threats from beyond the grave-type not good.

Given the recent traumas and whole existential tone, the She Hulk herself is largely lacking her normal sense of humour/outright aggression and the introspection may not be what fans are looking for. But the comic's lurking sense of un-nameable Big Bad is palpable and the willingness to look a crazy comics trope dead in the eye and ask 'Ok, so what would it be like to keep failing to stay dead?' is brave and well handled.

John Davis-Hunt's art is rock solid and particularly good on scenic details (like post-Cotati ruins and the decaying underworld of... is it She Hulk's subconscious...?) although the cover art depiction of She Hulk with almost randomly bulging musculature is just plain weird.

SPLEENY DOTSON



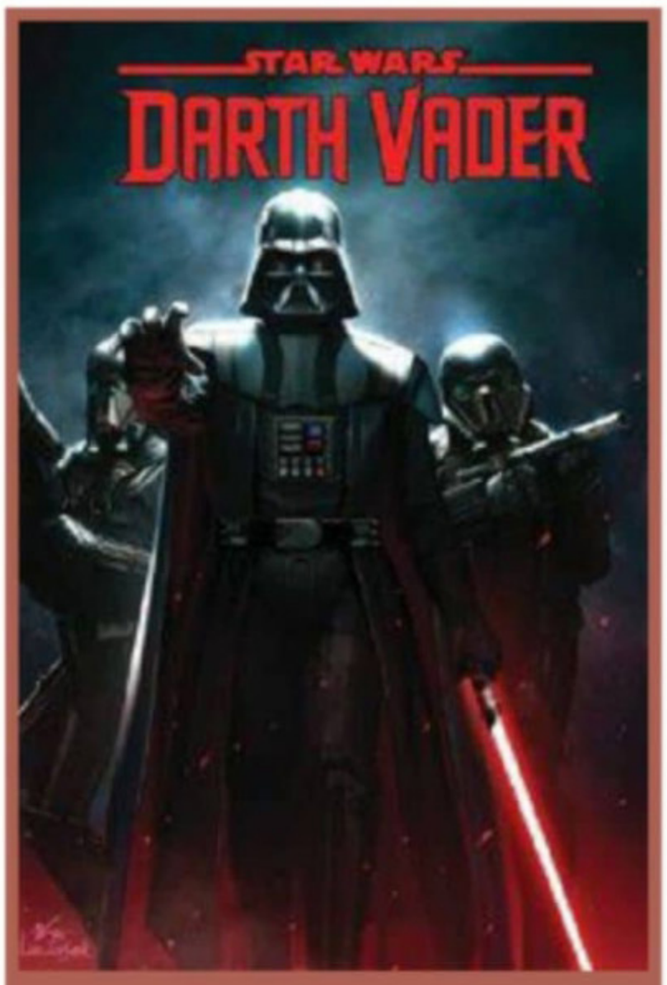
FORMAT: SINGLE ISSUE
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Ultramarines are often maligned as the 'vanilla' faction in the Warhammer 40,000 setting. The 'by-the-book' strait-laced Space Marines are frequently used to introduce people to the Grim Dark future and as such many of us move on to more quirky and bizarre elements of this massive franchise. Marvel Comics has chosen to take us back to basics with Warhammer 40,000: Marneus Calgar, giving us an origin story of sorts for one of Ultramarine's greatest heroes.

It's a very welcome approach; the first issue doesn't overload us with intricate lore, but instead, sets up the sort of mystery that humanity's genetically enhanced super-soldiers are good at solving - one that requires shooting things. Kieron Gillen plays this book incredibly straight. Calgar is a hero of the Imperium Mankind, steadfast and indefatigable. The voice of the character is perfect; this is an unyielding power in the face of insurmountable evil. The narrative introduces the basics of the setting without it feeling forced. This is a grim future, filled with war. Humanity stands on the edge of true chaos and worse. The result is lots of action and solid storytelling.

Jacen Burrow's art is a perfect mix of Games Workshop's busy Gothic style and Marvel's famously bold imagery, striking the balance between clarity and detail in an exact fashion, right down to the vehicles and armour. This is a promising start to what we hope becomes a very long running series.

ED FORTUNE



FORMAT: TRADE PAPERBACK
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 24TH

In the climax of The Empire Strikes Back, Darth Vader reveals he's Luke's father and asks him to join the Dark Side – a massive shock to audiences and Skywalker alike, but what's never been explored is how that encounter, in particular Luke's rejection, impacts daddy.

That's the pitch for Greg Pak's run on Darth Vader, which will follow the Dark Lord's life between Episodes V and VI. In this first volume, Vader's mad – his plans to overthrow the Emperor with his son at his side are kaput. Seeking explanation, he hunts down everyone involved in hiding Luke from him, and encounters... Padmé Amidala? Surely not!

Well, someone who looks a lot like Padmé... a certain twist from The Phantom Menace explains it. Vader teams up with old acquaintances of his wife (you'll recognise some, though mercifully not that Gungan) to investigate her final hours. With both these characters and Vader himself – at his most unstable – built on in interesting ways, Pak's script excellently combines the Imperial era and elements from the prequels into a coherent whole.

The same can be said of the artwork, as illustrator Raffaele Ienco and colourist Neeraj Menon depict this era's Naboo and its denizens with a mix of its colourful prequel grandiosity and the worn-down grittiness of the Empire. They also capture that cinematic Star Wars feel, with dramatic compositions befitting Vader's rage and plenty of exciting action, not least a battle against a certain 'bigger fish'.

KIERON MOORE



CRASH BANDICOOT 4: IT'S ABOUT TIME

PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Following the success of Crash's remastered N-Sane Trilogy and Team Racing, everyone's favourite bandicoot finally gets a proper sequel in It's About Time. The story is unimportant (something about masks) but the gameplay and level design is classic Crash. That is to say, classic Crash with a modern twist. Crash and Coco now have access to four Quantum Masks, each with its own unique power set; phasing objects in and out of existence, slowing time, reversing gravity and creating dark vortexes.

In addition to its Quantum Masks, It's About Time also introduces three newly-playable characters – Tawna (Crash's one-time girlfriend), Dingodile, and Neo Cortex himself. Popping up in their own bonus levels, these too have their own distinctive new gameplay styles and weaponry. It's About Time is constantly reinventing itself and its own gameplay, never content to sit and rest on its laurels. Crucially though, it always feels like proper Crash Bandicoot; in its sense of humour, gorgeous, creative level design... and controller-crushing difficulty.

Although there's nothing to infuriate in the same way as the first game's 'High Road' level, sections of gameplay will have players flinging controllers and abuse at their television sets. The 3D platforming adds an extra layer of difficulty to some of the jumps and hurdles. Leaping from teeny-tiny platform to teeny-tiny platform has never been more frustrating – especially given the unforgiving rate of fire and the inflexible camera. Thankfully, this is alleviated somewhat by the addition of an optional 'Modern' gameplay mode – infinite lives per level, doing away with those pesky 'Game Over' screens.

The first proper Crash sequel since 1998 (we don't count The Wrath of Cortex, and neither does this game), It's About Time finds the franchise in fine form. Exhilaratingly fun and frustrating in equal measure, it delivers the full Crash Bandicoot experience. It is, quite literally, about time.

JOEL HARLEY





HORACE

PLATFORM: SWITCH, PC

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Horace follows a robot's journey of self-discovery, from his arrival at the home of a wealthy Professor to an epic time-travelling intergalactic adventure... The story is very much front and centre, with players relying on cutscenes to tell them what to do next. Narrated by the innocent yet smart Horace in his synthesised robot tone, he often gives the impression he doesn't really understand what he's saying, but the player is always in on the joke. A lot of the humour and references might be lost on those unfamiliar with UK 'culture' of days gone by (mainly from the late '70s to mid-'90s), but those with a fondness for old British nonsense will be in their element.

The bulk of the gameplay sees Horace making his way through a wide variety of 2D environments with his gravity boots that allow him to stick to most surfaces. Levels rotate as Horace switches between platforms, allowing for plenty of inventive surprises as well as some rather fiendish puzzles. The difficulty really ramps up in the second half of the game, but infinite lives and generous checkpoints mean that it rarely feels too punishing. There are also many mini-games, from rhythm-based 'jobs' (sorting parcels, shaping bricks, drying dishes for old ladies...) to old-school arcade games, which break things up nicely.

Full of quirky, eccentric characters, 'mature' humour and challenging gameplay, Horace might look unassuming at first glance but is by far one of the most engaging and enjoyable indie games to appear for a long time. Its expertly-crafted story expands way beyond anything that the opening hour or two might suggest, and there are a staggering amount of ideas crammed into the game's 15 or so hours. 4.5 out of 5 (due to a few minor navigational issues), but we don't do half stars so we'll round it up. It really is that good!

CHRIS JACKSON





CLOUD PUNK

PLATFORM: XBOX ONE, PC, PS4, SWITCH

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Set in the futuristic, neon-drenched vertical city of Nivalis, players are thrust into the shoes of Rania, a delivery driver on her first night in the job. From the safety of her HOVA vehicle (a flying car, basically), Rania is directed to Cloudpunk HQ where she collects various packages to be delivered around the city. Within the opening minutes, mystery surrounds her predecessor's whereabouts, and things quickly get even more shady when her first task is to drop off a parcel in the Marrow, a seedy maze-like area in the lower part of town that is home to all manner of suspicious characters. But, as per your official instructions, there are only two rules you need to worry about: don't miss a delivery, and don't ask what's in the package...

This all sets the scene perfectly for what's to follow - Cloudpunk is high on mystery and intrigue, and builds its world tremendously well through interactions between the player and the city's residents. Heavily leaning into its sci-fi setting, you can clearly see influences of Blade Runner, The Fifth Element, and even a bit of Dredd/Mega-City One, and fans of the stories found in those films are likely to be equally enthralled by Cloudpunk's excellent narrative.

There isn't much going on besides flying around the city and talking to NPCs - the bulk of the game involves travelling from A to B, having a chat, then moving on elsewhere. But those looking for a sci-fi story-driven adventure are in for a real treat. There are moral decisions to be made (the temptation to break the rules might occasionally prove too much...), mysteries to solve and some incredibly memorable characters and encounters, all wrapped up in a uniquely atmospheric style. As long as you know what you're getting into, Cloudpunk's world is a joy to spend time in.

CHRIS JACKSON





NICKELODEON KART RACERS 2: GRAND PRIX

PLATFORM: SWITCH, PC, PS4, XBOX ONE

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

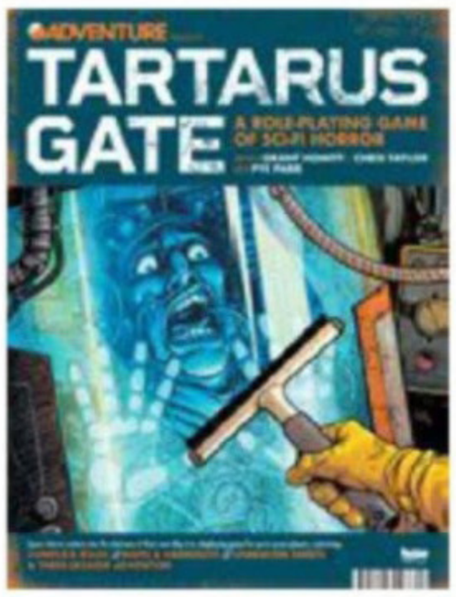
The follow up to 2018's poorly-received Nickleodeon Kart Racers is upon us. It promises to be bigger, but is it better? Or is it something you'll find in a Rugrat's diaper? The roster consist of an impressive 30 different characters from the most popular Nicktoon franchises over the last 30 years, including TMNT, Spongebob and Invader Zim. On top of these, there are also 70 more characters in the pit crew, offering extra perks such as turning you invisible after attacking. Game modes include Grand Prix, Free Races, Challenges, Time Trials and Arena, a very fun local multiplayer mode for up to four people, and online multiplayer (although, at the time of writing, we've been unable to find an online game). Combined with all the unlockables and customisation, NKR2 offers a lot of longevity.

The gameplay is really the bread and butter of this sort of title, and it pretty much copies Mario Kart down to a tee, with similar drifting and boosting mechanics, as well as items. The karts handle well but never quite seem as fast as they could be, and the track design isn't all that memorable (although it does have some pretty cool locations such as the Double Dare track). The visuals are OK, the game uses a colourful palette throughout but the art style is generic. The music is inoffensive without ever excelling and the lack of voices from characters is a bit disappointing.

Nickelodeon Kart Racers 2 doesn't offer anything that we haven't seen elsewhere - it reuses old ideas and puts a licensed coat of paint on them. That being said, it's still a decent game. It's not in the same league as Mario Kart or Crash Team Racing, but younger audiences will enjoy racing with the characters they love and parents will enjoy a nice nostalgia trip even if they can't hear Invader Zim's hilarious quips.

STEPHEN BOOTHROYD





ADVENTURE PRESENTS: TARTARUS GATE

PUBLISHER: REBELLION UNPLUGGED
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Rebellion Unplugged is the new gaming label from Rebellion Publishing, producers of the Galaxy's Greatest comic, 2000 AD. So it may come as no surprise that their new range of table top games have a very comic book-style feel. Adventure Presents: Tartarus Gate is a one-shot game designed to be done and dusted in a single session.

The players take on the roles of starship passengers and crew on their way to Tartarus Gate in the hopes of starting a better life on a distant world. Of course, something goes wrong and they're woken up from their cryo-sleep way too early. This is a slow-burn horror scenario, using the spaceship as a haunted house of sorts. It's got a very isolation horror vibe, reminiscent of various low budget sci-fi horrors.

This game feels like it could have been a story from the pages of 2000 AD itself. Pye Parr's art is visually striking and not only adds to the old school vibe of the game it also makes it a joy to read. Designer Grant Howitt's trademark 'short and sweet' style really suits this game.

Adventure Presents: Tartarus Gate is not very long but it does contain just enough world building to keep a band of gamers entertained for an evening. Because it's designed as a throw-away game you're more likely to take risks and do crazy things, revealing more plot along the way. It's great fun and we can't wait to see what Rebellion Unplugged does next.

ED FORTUNE



MARVEL HEROCLIX: GALACTUS THE DEVOURER

PUBLISHER: WIZKIDS
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER

One of the key features about the Marvel HeroClix range of games is that the models are approximately the traditional 28mm scale, so your average hero is pocket-sized and you can transport a bunch of them in a small box. Not so with Marvel HeroClix: Galactus the Devourer, a giant alien being who wears a huge, winged helmet and purple pants. In the comics, he's meant to be 28ft tall and weigh over 18 ton. This model is over foot tall.

Like many of the new clix models he's in a dynamic pose, specifically firing a great big bolt of energy out of one hand while building up more power in the other. The big purple planet eater has a shiny and comprehensive paint job and he looks extremely angry. The detail is very nice and he looks like he's leapt out of the pages of the Fantastic Four, ready to eat your gaming table.

Rules-wise, Galactus has a few good tricks up his cosmic sleeves. Not only does he have two clix dials-worth of cool powers, he has extra dials for other special abilities. His Elemental Converter dial essentially means that Galactus heals when an opponent is KO'd and that the edges of the map are being consumed by energy meaning that your heroes can't hang around the corners of the board without a risk of being eaten. Galactus also has a Herald dial which lets you power up other models and increases the playability.

Overall, Marvel HeroClix: Galactus the Devourer is a great expansion to an established game and looks lovely in the shelf when not in use.

ED FORTUNE



MAGIC: THE GATHERING ZENDIKAR RISING, SNEAK ATTACK

PUBLISHER: WIZARDS OF THE COAST
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Pre-constructed decks are the lifeblood of Magic: The Gathering. They allow highly collectable cards from previous releases to become more accessible while at the same time providing a point of access for new players. The new set sees Magic return to the land of Zendikar, an ever-shifting magical realm that has been recently ravaged by cosmic horrors.

The Sneak Attack set is a pre-built deck in the Commander format. That means you have one legendary creature and 99 other cards. Your legendary card is the Commander and sets the style for the rest of the deck. In this case, it's a foil card of Anowon, the Ruin Thief, a rogue who buffs other rogues. Not only that, but he also causes your opponents to lose cards from their deck. (Because he's a thief.)

The rest of the deck is absolutely crammed with thieves, plotters, shapeshifters, and other sneaky types. This is a blue/black deck, which means that it focuses on confounding and slowing down your foes using blue cards and then does gradual but progressive damage with black cards. There's a light necromancy theme to the deck but mostly this set of cards is about dirty deeds, done dirt cheap. Go for the throat quickly and take out as many opponents as you can; this deck isn't designed for a long, drawn out fight.

This is a decent introduction to the game though like most starter sets, it's light on the rules (that's what YouTube is for). For experienced players, there are plenty of value cards to add to existing decks. Worth a look.

ED FORTUNE

BRAVE NEW WORDS

EXPLORING THE WORLD OF GENRE LITERATURE WITH ED FORTUNE

CHECK OUT THE FOLIO

This issue, we look at the deluxe versions of classic literature that THE FOLIO SOCIETY bless us with...

In this digital age, it's easy to forget that there is a whole legacy behind the actual production of books. E-books and even paperbacks make it easy for us to forget that sometimes, you not only want to keep a book, you want that book to be nice. For example, for years I carried around a battered paperback version of Frank Herbert's sci-fi classic *Dune*. Not as an offensive weapon, you understand (though it's quite large and certainly has some heft to it), but because it's a long novel that I wanted to read more than once. Its size meant that the poor thing saw a lot of abuse. First the pages got crinkled, the cover and spine become covered in lines and it fell apart. By the end, it was mostly an abomination of tape and hope.

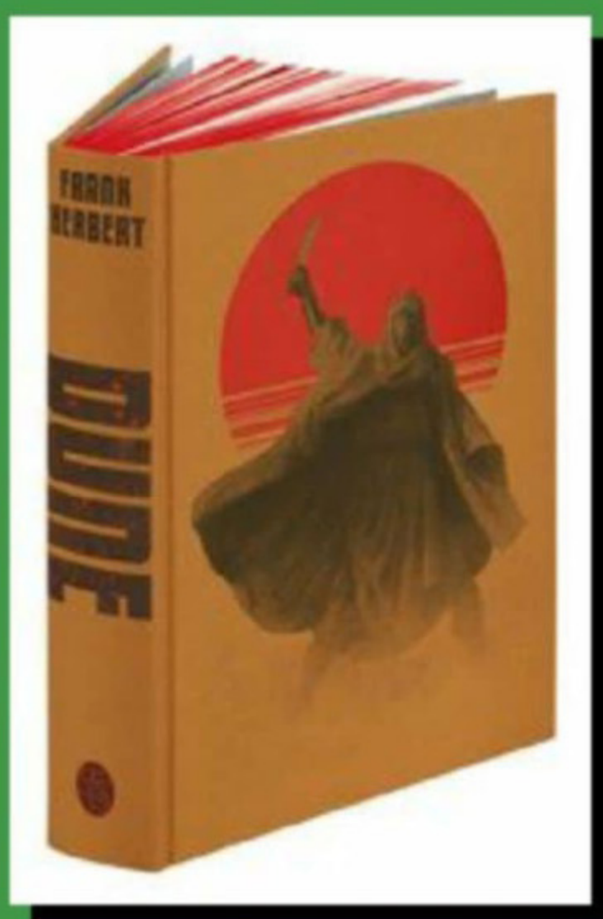
Eventually, I was able to invest in a new version; something more solid, a hardback. Over time, I decided that given that it was now mostly staying on the shelf, I was going to get a fancy copy. The Folio Society is a company that produces some stunningly gorgeous works. They've always made established classics into nice-looking tomes, because they make books that you want to keep. The result, of course, is that I own a version of *Dune* that has a slip case, has some gorgeous prints in it, an utterly gorgeous cover and it's just a pleasure to own and have sit on the shelf. It also comes with a new introduction. In the case of *Dune*, it's Pulitzer Prize-winning book critic Michael Dirda, who's always worth a read.

The Folio Society does a good chunk of the classics of sci-fi and fantasy. Their version of the Ursula Le Guin classic *The Left Hand of Darkness* is utterly lovely. It's easily a classic novel, and one that's generally regarded to have opened the doors for more introspective and staunchly feminist science fiction. Feminism and science fiction have always been close friends, of course, dating back to Lady Margaret Lucas Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, but I digress. The Folio Society version of *The Left Hand of Darkness* has some utterly gorgeous illustrations throughout and there's a real skill to creating an image that complements a well-loved work. They seem to have a way of picking images similar to the ones in your head. It also has an introduction from Becky Chambers, who wrote the excellent Wayfarers series. (And honestly, if you've not read those books but you like Le Guin, well you should get your hands on Becky's books as soon as you can.) If you can't get enough of Le Guin, then they also do a fancy version of *The Dispossessed*. There's a slight irony here given the nature of the story, which explores anarcho-syndicalism and capitalism. Still, it's a very pretty thing to own.

"The Folio Society make books that you want to keep."

The Folio Society's version of *Ubik* is notable, not only for the fact that they've put out one of Philip K. Dick's least understood novels, but for its striking design: a pink slip-case and lime green book. The internal illustrations are pretty damned surreal and match the surreal sci-fi horror story perfectly.

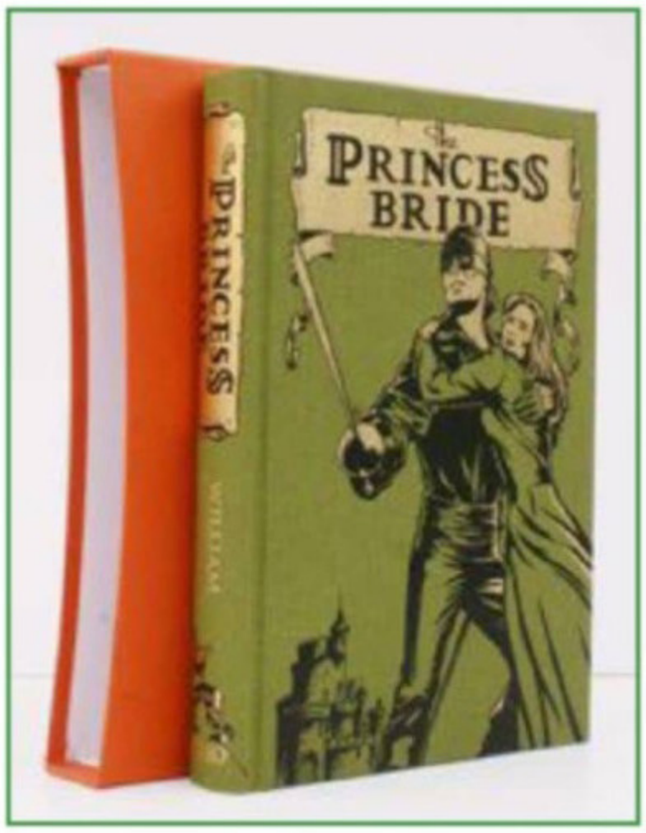
Another Folio Edition that is worth a mention is their version of *The Princess Bride*. William Goldman's much beloved fairy tale and fantasy pastiche is perhaps better known due to the movie version. The special hardback is notable for its illustrations. These are by Mark Thomas,





Dune







best known for his vintage style artwork. Thomas creates images that look like they're from a bygone age, a time when things seemed more romantic. This old-fashioned style is perfect for Goldman's prose and makes the whole thing feel like a proper fairy story, and certainly the sort of storybook you'd want to have to hand if you ever had to read it out to a beloved younger relative.

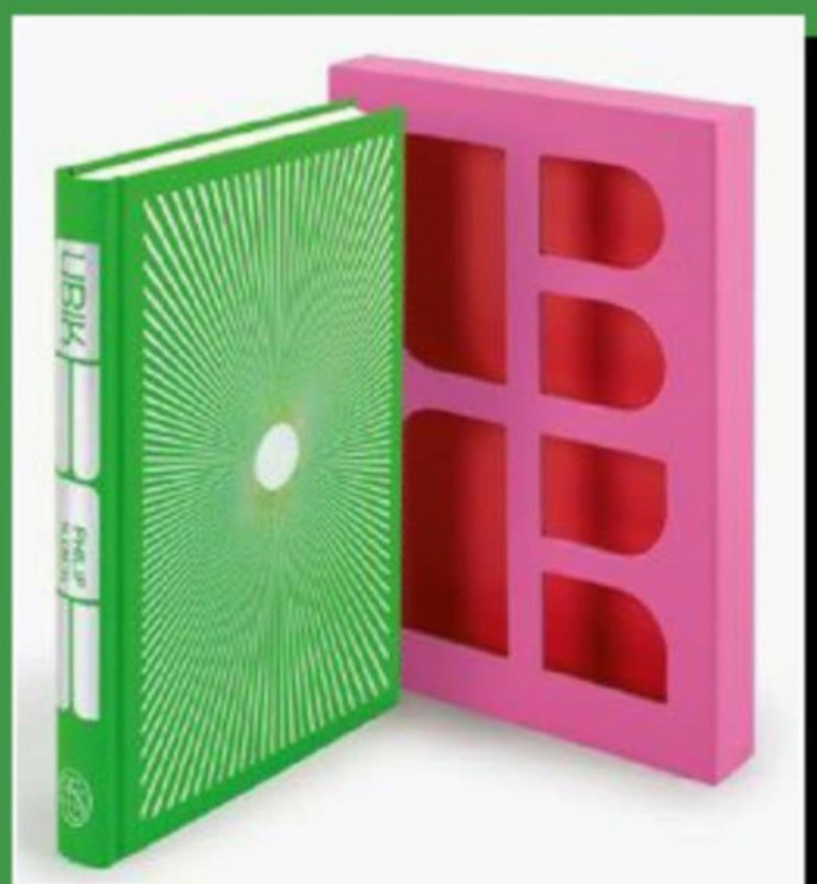
Amongst the list of great editions, there's also their take on Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*. For many of us, the only artist we associated with Neil Gaiman's work is Dave McKean, who produced so many wonderful covers for *The Sandman*. Here, he provides some gorgeous abstract plates. McKean also does the introduction, and his perspective is always welcome. This is also something of a special edition in the sense that it's a different edit of the book than was originally released. The book itself, of course, is considered to be the cornerstone of the urban fantasy genre, having inspired many 'gods among us' stories in popular media.

I can't resist pointing out that they somehow also made Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* look pretty. Given that the book itself is utterly worthless, over-rated, and is essentially the toxic ravings of a repulsive narcissist and sociopath, it's a credit to the publisher that the book at least looks nice. It's not worth the read, however, and is perhaps the most over-hyped book in the entire genre. It's a book many of us love to hate and way too many people take seriously. Again, it contains an introduction from Dirda, who is perhaps the only thing worth reading in that tome.

Of course, the Folio Society don't have a monopoly on pretty books, even though the independent publisher does have the best track record on producing the most collectable items. Books are, of course, meant to be read but if you're going to spend a lot of time with a particular title, it's nice to get one that is rather lovely, even if it does rather ritualise the process of reading the thing. Now if you'll excuse me, I need to go and put up a new bookshelf...

As always you can catch the Brave New Words podcast on iTunes and Spotify (be sure to leave a rating if you give us a listen). We've been delayed a little this year, but we'll be back soon. And as always, you can email at ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com with your exciting book news, questions, and offers of six-figure book deals.







Paul Mount's









This issue, we favour fact over fantasy in Netflix's CHALLENGER: THE FINAL FLIGHT, enjoy a taste of THE RIGHT STUFF, travel to THE TWILIGHT ZONE and dodge dinosaurs in JURASSIC WORLD: CAMP CRETACEOUS... raaaaarghhh!

I believe it was Mark Twain who suggested that fact is stranger than fiction. (Actually, I *know* it was... that's what Wikipedia is for.) Fiction - certainly *our* kind of fiction - can be quite bizarre, of course, but there's certainly an argument to be had that fact is at least very often a damn sight more *interesting* than fiction. We need look no further than Netflix's enthralling and fascinating four-part documentary series **Challenger: The Final Flight** for proof that real-life stories of space heroism and exploration are far more nail-biting and, on this particular occasion, heart-breaking, than any fictional space adventure story. Watching **Challenger: The Final Flight** across one breathless afternoon, I was reminded that some of my favourite genre material of the last few years has actually had one foot in the real world of man's stumbling attempts at stepping away from his mortal coil. **First Man** is probably my favourite film of the last five years (shoulder-to-shoulder with Ridley Scott's **The Martian**, if you must know). I adored Theodore Melfi's **Hidden Figures**, based on Margot Lee Shetterly's book about black female mathematicians working for NASA in the early days of the Space Race, and I seem to recall that I was one of the few who found a good word to say about the one-season wonder 2018 series **The First**, starring Sean Penn, an often-gripping (but occasionally slightly too soapy) fictional account of America's race to send men to Mars in the aftermath of a terrible tragedy uncomfortably similar to the real-world events depicted in **Challenger: The Final Flight**. But then there's **Away**, Netflix's recent series about a female-led mission to Mars... but you can check out what I thought of that one elsewhere in this issue.

The story of the 1986 Challenger disaster is, in many ways, pure Hollywood. With the Apollo moon landing programme fizzling out in 1972 (hard to imagine now but the public had lost interest in what they seemed to perceive as fairly routine and boring journeys to our cold and barren natural satellite), NASA set to developing the space shuttle project, a partially-reusable low Earth orbital spacecraft system initially intended for regular commercial and scientific use with the goal that, once established, it would launch 24 missions per year, quickly covering the eye-watering cost of its development. To encourage the public to take an interest in a rather dry project that couldn't help seeming a bit less exciting and ambitious than even the moon landings, then-President, Ronald Reagan, announced in 1985 that a civilian teacher would be selected to



CHALLENGER: THE FINAL FLIGHT



become one of the astronauts for a 1986 shuttle launch. New Hampshire-born teacher Christa McAuliffe was selected from more than 11,000 applications and whittled down from a shortlist of a dozen potentials. Christa McAuliffe become an instant national hero and the American public followed her training and her progress towards the mission with enthusiasm and affection. What happened on January 28th, 1986 when the Challenger lifted off from Cape Canaveral and broke apart 73 seconds later is a moment that remains frozen in history and burned into the memories of those who witnessed this appalling, unthinkable tragedy as it unfolded before their disbelieving eyes.

The story of the Challenger mission has been told before, of course, in numerous documentaries and even in a handful of films such as 1990's **Challenger** starring Karen Allen. But this magnificent Netflix documentary series is the definitive and surely final version of the events, beginning with the blast-off of the Challenger but pausing just before the tragedy itself. We are taken back through the history of the space programme and its declining fortunes in the 1970s and into the arrival of the shuttle programme upon which all NASA's hopes for the future of space exploration rested. The four hour-long episodes don't really disclose any new information about the shuttle programme and the tragedy of the Challenger flight - the causes of the tragedy have been well-documented - but it's presented here via a succession of intimate, non-judgmental up-to-date and archive interview material from those close to Christa herself and many of those working in and around NASA at the time, several of whom were responsible for decisions that were to have terrible repercussions and whose faces are still haunted by the memories of what they did and what they didn't do. The real tragedy of the Challenger mission is that it was entirely foreseeable and that it shouldn't have happened. Launched in bitterly cold January weather, the Challenger blew apart because the O-Ring seals used in the joints of the vehicle's right solid rocket booster were not designed to handle such unnaturally cold conditions. This wasn't an unforeseen problem and the series crisply addresses the issue as it presented itself both before and after the launch - chillingly replayed towards the end of the third episode - and the final episode explores the aftermath of the disaster and the official enquiry, which plays out like some bizarre Hollywood conspiracy thriller full of cover-ups, withheld information, and secret notes passed discretely in corridors.

It's a credit to mankind's resilience that the Challenger disaster wasn't the end of the shuttle programme nor was it the end of its story of disaster (the Columbia shuttle broke apart on re-entry in 2003), although it was eventually 'retired' in 2011. Many of the shuttle programme's functions are now carried out by various government and private enterprises, but **Challenger: The Final Flight** stands not only as a testimony and a tribute to those who lost their lives that fateful day in January 1986 but also the gripping, informative, and cautionary story of a great human adventure. Hopefully, it can also serve to remind us - as we seem increasingly determined to turn the planet we live on into a stinking rubbish tip - that humanity has the capacity to achieve great things and that, despite the terrible tragedy and adversity that seems to dog us all, perhaps one day we will rise to achieve great things again on and off the planet we call Home.

The arrival of **The Right Stuff** (Disney+), a new eight-episode series based both on Tom Wolfe's 1979 book and its acclaimed 1983 movie adaptation, could hardly be more timely. This too tells, with the usual liberties required of fictionalised accounts of real-life people and events, the story of man's adventures in space, taking us back to 1959 and NASA's determination to beat those pesky Russians and establish an essential first foothold in space. Two episodes in and I'm cautiously hooked. **The Right Stuff** is enjoyable stuff, its debut instalments focusing on the recruitment of what appears to be an ill-matched bunch of astronauts - we all know the names of John Glenn, Gus Grissom, and Alan Shepherd - as they are recruited to become the original astronauts for the Mercury space programme. The episodes are busy introducing us to its key players, all 'family men' who become national celebrities overnight and at the moment, the series is more concerned with setting them up and exploring how they cope with their sudden fame/infamy and the toll it will take on them and their families rather than the space exploration stuff we might have signed up for. The show isn't afraid to be a little hokey; the narrative isn't exactly subtle and the use of background contemporary pop songs is a little intrusive and wearing (seriously, we're adults, we're able to remember this is supposed to be 1959 without you bombarding us with the Space Age equivalent of **Top of the Pops**), but I'm on board for the rest of the series (and proposed follow-up series intended to take us to the 1969 moon landing and beyond), if only because it's a blessed relief to watch a show aimed at grown-ups and without any sign of bloody moody teenagers agonising about how to use their special powers and arguing with pesky adults *who just don't understand them*. Hallelujah.

I wasn't much taken with last year's first run of episodes from Jordan Peele's new **The Twilight Zone**, but the second ten-episode run, aired in the US back in June and now available in the UK, weekly on Sky One (and as a Now TV boxset), seems like a significant step-up in quality. The first series never really caught fire (and I don't recall actually making it through the





whole run) and even though Jordan Peele looked very nice in a suit as the narrator, he's really no Rod Serling. Plus the episodes weren't well-served by a clear determination to tick boxes rather than tell ingenious, surprising stories. I've binged six episodes of this second series and the improvement is almost physical with even the two weakest episodes surpassing the best of what I saw in last year's first run. The series kicks off with the pleasingly-noirish *Meet in the Middle* in which sad singleton Phil (Jimmi Simpson) hears the voice of a woman in his head and begins to embark on a strange and disturbing relationship that takes a turn for the very dark when he arranges to meet the real woman who is somehow communicating with him in his head at a location hallway between the pair of them. The twist ending is probably quite obvious is hindsight but it's still a deftly-handled "*What the actual...?*" moment. *The Who of You* is a brilliant and enthralling 'body swap' drama with a seriously killer twist and *Ovation* is a powerful 'be careful what you wish for' story about the pressures of sudden fame on those unprepared for it. Jordan Peele's own brief *Downtime* stars **Firefly** fan-favourite Morena Baccarin as an overachieving hotel manager who finds that her life isn't quite what she thought it was; it's predicated on a hoary old SF 'virtual reality world' concept and it doesn't really go anywhere but it's still probably the best story Peele himself has brought to the screen (I'm no fan of the clunky mechanics of his storytelling in **Get Out** and **Us**), *8* riffs cleverly on **The Thing from Another World** and only *Among the Untrodden* really failed to engage me in its story of teens (them again!) dabbling with strange psychic powers (them again!). With anthology shows clearly back in fashion nowadays and **Black Mirror** apparently on an indefinite hiatus, it's good to see **The Twilight Zone** stepping up to the mark and finding its confidence in its second year as there was always a risk that this reboot, if not handled delicately and intelligently, could sully the name of one of the great heritage genre shows from the early days of television. But if Season 2 can maintain this momentum, it's on course to hold its head up high and could become a show that the late, great Mr Serling himself would approve of.

Finally this month, if you're suffering from a bout of entirely understandable dinosaur despair at the news that **Jurassic World: Dominion**, the third in the latest trilogy of stories now really only vaguely connected to Michael Crichton's original novel, has been bumped back a year in the cinema release schedule to 2022 because of you-know-what, then you might want to pull yourself together and take a look at Netflix's fun eight-part animation series **Jurassic World: Camp Cretaceous**. Cleverly set before, during, and just after the events of **Jurassic World** itself (a couple of sequences from the film are recreated in animation and observed by characters from the series) we follow the exploits of six teenagers enjoying a once-in-a-lifetime experience at a new adventure camp on the far side of Isla Nublar. The first couple of episodes are a little bland and overly kid-friendly, but when the narrative starts to dovetail with the events from the film - basically, the dinosaurs are on the loose and causing havoc across the island - the pace really picks up and it becomes very much its own beast. There's a real sense of jeopardy in the kids' adventures as they race to get across the island to the evacuation point and the characters, initially slightly annoying, high-pitched stereotypes, are nicely fleshed out as we learn more about them and their own weaknesses and frailties. I'd go as far as to say that at points, **Camp Cretaceous** might be a little too intense for some of its intended young audience (i.e. those of a nervous disposition) and the cliffhanger ending clearly sets up a second series, just commissioned by Netflix at the time of writing. Terrifically animated and generally well-written (the show doesn't write down for the kids), **Camp Cretaceous** will at least satisfy the creature cravings of those waiting to see if **Dominion** can put the live-action series back on track after the disappointing and tonally-jarring **Fallen Kingdom**. But that's another story...

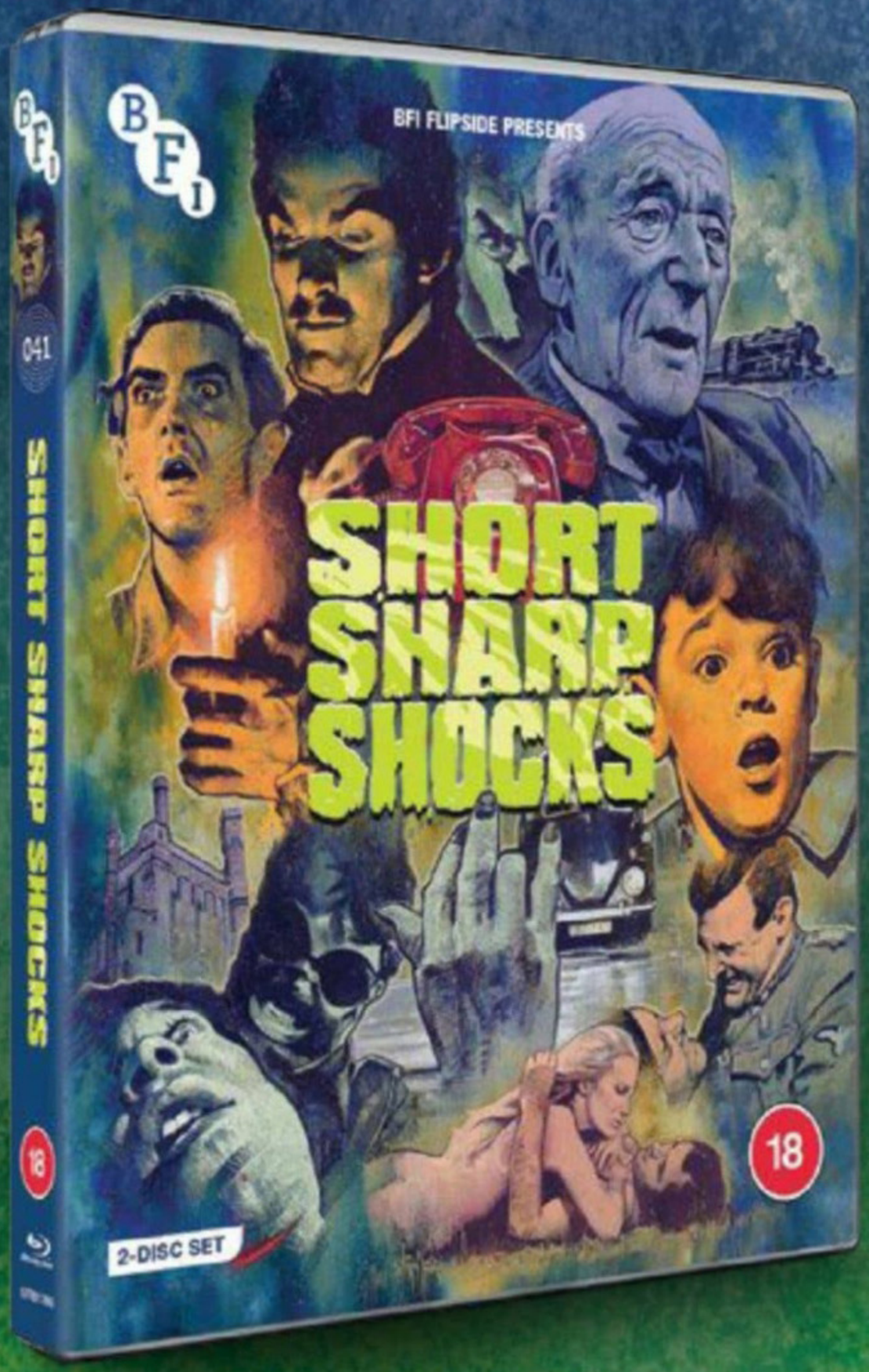
That's it for now. See you next issue, unless we've all gone extinct within the next few weeks... and let's face it, pretty much anything can happen these days and very probably will.

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